



A L A S C O :

A TRAGEDY,

IN FIVE ACTS,

By MARTIN ARCHER SHEE, Esq. R. A.
"

EXCLUDED FROM THE STAGE,

BY THE

AUTHORITY OF THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN.

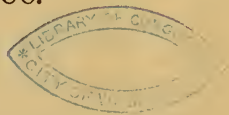
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TO

MISS TUNNO,

TAPLOW-LODGE, BUCKS

MY DEAR MADAM,

IT was at your suggestion I first conceived the idea of writing a Tragedy; I have, therefore, some claim to be allowed the liberty which I now take, in thus publicly addressing to you the following attempt in that species of composition.

I should, perhaps, hesitate to offer to you a production which makes its appearance under the discredit of official censure, if I did not know that to all the gentler virtues and graces which can adorn your own sex, you add the firmness which belongs to ours: "ALASCO" will not find less favor in your eyes, because he is an object of persecution.

If, under the impulse which you communicated, I have been guilty of offence, it will have been the first instance

DEDICATION.

in which your influence has failed to rectify the spirit over which it was exercised, or to purify what it inspired.

Your taste will, I fear, find as little to commend in the poetical, as your candor will have to reprove in the moral qualities of my work. Your kindness, however, will accept it with indulgence, as a testimony of the respect, regard, and admiration, which your virtues, your talents, and your acquirements have excited in,

My Dear Madam,

Your most sincerely devoted

And obliged friend and servant,

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE.

Cavendish Square, March, 1824.

P R E F A C E.

THE Tragedy which is offered to the inspection of the Public, in the following pages, has been excluded from the stage, by the authority of the Lord Chamberlain. This circumstance will, I trust, be considered as sufficient, not only to excuse, but to require some observations from him who has avowed himself to be the author of a production thus officially stigmatized.

How far the existence of such an engine of authority as that which has been on this occasion so energetically employed, may be consistent with the spirit of a free government, or

with the dignity and independence of dramatic literature in this country, is a consideration which touches matters too high to be meddled with by me. I leave that question, therefore, in the hands of those who are competent to examine it without partiality, and to decide on it without presumption.

A few comments, however, on the manner in which the power here spoken of has been recently displayed, will not, perhaps, be thought unbecoming in him whose feelings and whose interests have so severely suffered by its exercise.

It is always irksome to a man of any sensibility or delicacy, to be obliged to speak of himself;—to an artist of retired and studious habits, this task becomes doubly disagreeable. Indeed, were there no other interests concerned than those which relate to so unimportant an individual as the author of “ALASCO,” I should hardly have supposed that I was warranted in obtruding myself or my play on the

public attention ; and, professionally engaged as I am, in a different pursuit, I might possibly have submitted, in silent indignation, to an act of authority which I conceive to be not more unusual than unprovoked.

But the case appears to involve a question of no small public interest—a question of no less importance, than whether the English drama shall be allowed to preserve the high character which it has hitherto maintained ;—whether it shall continue to be the fearless reflector of our national spirit and characteristic independence, or sink at once, beneath the vigorous vigilance of the new censor, to be the dull, muddy medium of interested servility and abject adulation ;—whether, in short, the British Theatre shall, in future, afford an intellectual enjoyment worthy of a free people ;—whether it shall be a scene to which honest and honorable minds may resort, to hear the sentiments of honor and virtue uttered in language springing from the heart of integrity, and

breathing the vigor of truth; or whether it shall be degraded to a place, where we may expose everything but public vice, and inculcate anything but public virtue;—a place, which the vile and the venal may visit, without the fear of being put out of countenance;—where the slave and the sycophant may see themselves reflected in flattering similitude, and sit in all the complacency of self-admiration.

I am not unaware, that a strong sense of the injustice which I think I have experienced,—an honest indignation, on finding myself forced before the bar of the public, to answer for my production and my principles,—may possibly give to my remarks the tone of resentment. I have been shut out from a fair field of honorable ambition,—obstructed in the honest exertion of my feeble powers, to sustain my character and station in society, with such little credit and consideration as may be attainable in my humble sphere. Thus circumstanced, when the official stigma which has

been cast on my work is considered in all its bearings,—in its origin, its object, and its effect,—I feel confident, that no generous spirit will be surprised at a warmth of exculpation, which the consciousness of that uprightness of intention which has been acknowledged, and that innocence of offence which I assert, might be reasonably expected to produce.

The office of Licensor of Plays had been, for many years, administered by its late possessor, with great good sense and discretion. Its powers, at all times obnoxious to a free people, were neither arrogantly displayed, nor vexatiously exercised. No complaints were excited by their severity, and no evils resulted from their relaxation. All, in short, was harmony and peace.

“ So mild he swayed the drama’s pleased domains,

“ That bards and actors hardly felt their chains.”

But a new era was in preparation for the Thespian tribes; and when the respectable

functionary here alluded to, was gathered to his fathers, the stage soon felt the influence of a busier, if not a better spirit. The new licenser, it seems, felt it his duty to turn over a new leaf; he resolved to shame the sinecure sway of his predecessor, and indulge in all the luxury of active molestation. He disdains to be a theatrical King Log; and, to the terror of us poor dramatic tad-poles, he sets about to stir up the puddle around him, with stork-like vigour, and devouring effect.

An enlightened view of the calamitous consequences which have resulted from the incautious toleration of such combustible blank verse as that of "Brutus," "Virginus," "Caius Gracchus," and other metrical immoralities, has operated to warn this vigilant officer to provide against any similar explosions. He has therefore prudently interfered to extinguish, at once, all those squibs and crackers of the imagination, with which impertinent poets have hitherto been allowed to

pepper the repose of moral and political delinquency. A more effective dramatic police has been established; a new committee of public safety has been organized in the Chamberlain's office; the country has been declared in danger, and a dictator of unquestioned qualification appointed to watch over the welfare of the state.

Unfortunately, I have been the first victim to this new vigour;—the first offender under the new code which it has been determined to enforce; convicted without trial, and condemned without appeal. For the honor of dramatic literature, which is so seriously involved in the verdict, I could wish that its interests were in abler hands; that my production were more worthy of its cause, and my powers more competent to its defence. But, though conscious of the hazards of the war, and, from the peculiarity of my position, exposing a double front to the enemy, I shall not shrink from the honourable post in which I find myself so unex-

pectedly placed, but endeavour to do my duty on this, as I hope I have done on most other occasions.

I may possibly be told, that the power of which I complain is not to be questioned;—that the Licenser is absolute and uncontrolled;—that it is competent to his discretion, to suppress any sentiment which may not accord with his particular feelings, or any expression which may be offensive to his peculiar taste.

That the power to commit such folly and injustice exists in full force, I have had a very convincing proof;—that “man clothed in a little brief authority” may “play such fantastic tricks before high heaven,” the treatment that “Alasco” has experienced, puts beyond all doubt. For the Theatre, there is indeed no redress;—in that unhappy region of official domination, (if I may venture to quote a line that will be found in the following pages.)

“All is mutiny, that’s not submission.”

To the dramatic author, however, there is yet left one resource.—Though the exalted personage who wields the thunder of authority, has refused to enquire if the bolt have been, properly directed ;—though he will not condescend “to argue” the point, with the unhappy victim of his wrath, but politely informs him, that the “*sic volo*” of his deputy is the law and the gospel of his case; yet it is to be hoped, that before the bar of the public, in this free country, we may question the conduct of even this formidable functionary, this “*Rey absoluto*” of the stage, without exciting a suspicion of disloyalty, or incurring the charge of presumption.

The office of Licensor, I conceive, must have been originally established for the purpose of superintending the morals and manners of the stage. It must have been intended to protect the feelings and interests of individuals from the assaults of ridicule or malignity; and to guard the religious and political institutions of our country from being made the

objects of profane ribaldry and factious abuse. When the form and constitution of our government,—the character and functions of the first magistrate,—the dignity and virtue of our senate, the sanctity of our christian establishments, or the general purity of our judicature, are assailed with wanton insult, or stigmatized with mischievous malevolence, it is possible the interests of society may derive some protection from such an authority, although, in the ordinary operation of the laws, a remedy might be found, much more constitutional, and not less efficacious. *

* Lord Chesterfield, in his speech on the Licenser's Bill, makes the following observation: "If poets and players are to be restrained, let them be restrained as other subjects are, by the known laws of their country; if they offend, let them be tried as every Englishman ought to be, by God and their country; do not let us subject them to the arbitrary will and pleasure of any one man. A power lodged in the hands of one single man, to judge and determine, without any limitation, without any control or appeal, is a sort of power unknown to our laws, inconsistent with our constitution. It is a higher, a more absolute power than we trust even to the King himself, and therefore I must think, we ought not to vest any such power in his Majesty's Lord Chamberlain.

The powers of an office so inquisitorial and so liable to be abused, should, however, be placed in judicious hands, and exercised with the most scrupulous delicacy and discretion.

To suppose that in a free country like this, such an authority could have been set up, as an instrument for obstructing the expression of all manly and patriotic feelings ;—that it could have been intended as an artful outpost to intercept, in their progress to the public ear, the honest accents of truth, and the wholesome lessons of public virtue, would be to calumniate as grossly those by whom in past times this power was established, as to act on such a supposition, is to insult those, who, in the present day, are considered to be in any respect gratified by its perversion.

But it may be observed, that even the language of truth is sometimes impolitic as well as unpalatable ; and we have it from high authority, that sentiments unexceptionable in themselves, and springing from *upright intentions*, may possibly, in times like the present,

be so pregnant with dangerous consequences, as to justify an extraordinary interference of power for their suppression.

What there is in the present time, in this country, to render the dramatic development of any honest principle,—the energetic expression of any patriotic sentiment, injurious to the interests, or unfit for the ears of Englishmen, I must own myself at a loss to discover.—It has been announced from the throne itself, that all is peace, order, and prosperity;—that the Empire reposes in all the security of general contentment, under a system of impartial law and rational liberty. It seems rather extraordinary, that such a moment should be considered as a happy opportunity to cast a stigma on the expression of those principles, through the operation of which, such blessings have been obtained. It seems odd, that at such a moment, it should be thought expedient to wind up the Chamberlain's authority to the highest pitch of precaution, and push it to a vigour beyond the law. “Let us” cries the new organ of official

vigilance, “no longer tolerate the presumptuous privilege of the stage!—Now that we are great and prosperous, let us boldly reprobate and put down those maxims of public and private morality to which we are indebted for our elevation:—since we cannot have a religious, let us invigorate our theatrical inquisition, and immolate the Drama and its interests, in an official ‘*auto da fé*.’”

The familiar of this holy office, indeed, displays the burning zeal of a new convert: he is hardly invested with the insignia of his function, when he rushes forward to shew the edifying alacrity with which he pounces on a liberal thought, and would strangle a patriotic sentiment in its birth. Like a prophet, he may not perhaps, be honored in his own country:—the sturdy spirit of an Englishman is not quite prepared for his operations; not yet rectified to the desired standard of political or poetical servility. There are, however, congenial scenes, where he would find himself more at

home ; where his ardor would probably be more admired, and where it is to be regretted, that his powers are not exercised. How would he distinguish himself under the Autocrat of all the Russias, as “conservator morum” amongst Cossacks and Calmucks ! With what appropriate vigour would he officiate as dramatic censor to the Dey of Algiers !

The zeal of this exemplary officer is, indeed, of a character which forcibly reminds us of the old adage : “defend me from my friends, and I will take care of my enemies.” He pays the government under which he lives, and by which he has been so judiciously selected for the post he enjoys, the happy compliment to suppose, that if tyranny be but mentioned, oppression alluded to, or usurpation exposed, it is “a palpable hit” at our constituted authorities. With a precautionary *naïveté*,—an official *étourderie*, somewhat embarrassing, I should suppose, to the powers whom he so discreetly labours to propitiate, he proceeds to prove, that he considers our public function-

aries as so many political culprits, writhing under the consciousness of crime;—and as, like Hamlet, he has heard—

“ That guilty creatures sitting at a play,
“ Have by the very cunning of the scene
“ Been struck so to the soul, that presently,
“ They have proclaimed their malefactions,”

—he generously resolves, that they shall not be exposed to such “compunctious visitings of nature,” as this dangerous dramatic test is so calculated to produce.

I must own I had formed a very different estimate of the qualities and principles which influence and characterize our public authorities. I never allowed myself for a moment, to believe, that general expressions of indignation against tyranny, rapine, and oppression, could be considered invidious, unpalatable, or reprehensible in this free country, more particularly at a time, when her best and dearest interests appear to be somewhat endangered by the desolating despotism which surrounds her. I conceived that the character of a patriot,

which I have attempted to draw, however dangerous or designing it might be thought at Madrid, or Constantinople, would not be considered as out of keeping with the spirit and principles of the British Constitution. However ardent my play may be, in the reprobation of acknowledged crime, or the recommendation of acknowledged virtue, it never occurred to my imagination, that any honest Englishman could find offence in it; or that even a prudent placeman could be found, who would, on such grounds, avow his disapprobation of it, or hesitate to exclaim with Hamlet:

“ Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.”

It would, indeed, be a melancholy indication, that a new and portentous spirit was rising amongst us, if the act of authority here commented on, had proceeded from any source more important than the loyal indiscretion of the new functionary. Notwithstanding, however, that rumour has announced to us the existence of a determination to re-animate the long

dormant energies of his office, I will not do those enlightened and liberal minds, who seem so zealously employed in restoring amongst us a just tone of political feeling, and the true principles of national prosperity, the injustice to suppose that they could have suggested or sanctioned so startling an exercise of its powers. Be this as it may, the interest which I have in the question, is, I conceive, of little moment, compared to the various important considerations which belong to it. The wrong which I have suffered is, it appears, without a remedy. The dramatic writer is put out of the pale of the constitution; handed over to irresponsible authority, to be dealt with by summary process; to be blotted out of theatrical existence in a flourish of red ink;—his time, his talents, his feelings, his interests, and his reputation, may all be sacrificed without ceremony, at the caprice of a personage distinguished by no more important a designation than that of “Examiner of Plays.”

One of those accidental impulses, which so

often and so strangely influence the character and actions of man, made me the author of a tragedy, of which I can conscientiously declare, that no pious divine ever sat down to the preparation of his sermon, with a more zealous desire to recommend the interests of religion and morality, than that which actuated my pen to render my composition a vehicle for the inculcation of every public and private virtue. It seems, however, that my dramatic homily was out of season; the tenets of my tragic discourse are not held to be orthodox by the Grand Inquisitor of the Lord Chamberlain's office, or conformable to the faith which he is determined to enforce. There are, it seems, crimes which must not be censured, even in the abstract, — virtues which it is seditious to commend. We must not point a shot of honest indignation against the most appalling atrocities of other times, or distant countries, lest the wind of the ball should do execution in its course, or some domestic delinquency be caught in the rebound.

Well! be it so! Little qualified as I am to add to the dignity of the stage, I can suffer but little in its degradation. My share in the concern, as it began, so it will end, with the subject of the present publication. I have been but a short sojourner in the dramatic tenement, and am easily dislodged: let those who are dwellers therein, look to it, before it be shaken to its foundation; before the stage shall be deprived of that lofty function which, in better times, belonged to it, “To hold the mirror up to nature; to shew *virtue* her own feature, *vice* her own image, and the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure.”

The offence which I have committed, I am not likely to repeat. There is little to be envied in the feelings of that writer, who can acquiesce in the arrogant control to which he is now subjected.—What picture of prostrate talent and debased literary spirit can be more humiliating than that which represents an unhappy dramatic poet struggling in such tram-

mels! Imagine the mortification of genius preparing for such a review!—cooking his conceptions to the taste of authority;—anxiously picking out, as poisonous, every ingredient of good feeling, and seasoning his production, not to his own liking,—not to the palate of the public, but according to the official relish of distempered court zeal!—the new licenser, clad in the armour of irresponsible power, riding his imagination like a night-mare, to scare him from the expression of every liberal thought, or patriotic sentiment.

As yet, indeed, no great mischief has been done. The public have little cause to regret that they have not been permitted to witness the representation of *Alasco*; and I am perfectly willing to anticipate so far, the sarcasms of those who may be now sharpening their pens for my discomfiture, as to admit, that if the new despot of the stage should have to answer for no heavier sin against the dramatic

literature of his country, than that of having repelled me from its precincts, his sway will have been as harmlessly, as it has been offensively exercised.

It is necessary, that I should now proceed to enable the reader to judge of the motives which influenced, and the poetical principles which directed me, in the composition of the following Tragedy.

To do this in a manner the least liable to the suspicion (which some persons might be prompt enough to express) that my statement was accommodated to the occasion, I feel myself called upon to insert here, the letter which I addressed to Mr. Charles Kemble, in June last, on sending him my play.

(Copy)

Cavendish Square, June, 1823.

DEAR SIR,

I send you the Tragedy which I mentioned to you on Thursday morning—You will per-

ceive that "*Alasco*" is the part which, in imagination, I had destined for you.

As far as I have been able to observe, our tragedies have, of late years, suffered some diminution of that effect which their merits in other respects, were well calculated to produce, from three causes:—In the first place, the interest of the plot has too often turned upon the vicious, rather than the virtuous passions of mankind:—secondly, in order to give an exaggerated and unpicturesque importance to one or two characters, the rest of the *Dramatis Personæ* have been flattened to a dead level of insignificance and insipidity,—which has made the play, unless when the hero or heroine have occupied the scene, a kind of dramatic waste, without an object of sufficient consequence to operate, either as a relief or a contrast to the principal figure:—thirdly, the characters appear not to be sufficiently discriminated, either as to peculiarity of thought or expression; and it would seem

a point of ambition with the writer, rather to put into their mouths, what is called fine poetry, than fit and appropriate dialogue.

In the dramatic attempt which I now submit to you, I have endeavoured to avoid these defects.—Whatever interest it may possess, arises, almost entirely, from the conflict of virtuous passions—I have tried to preserve such a gradation in the characters, as, while it leaves the principal personages sufficiently prominent, secures to the general effect, *five* parts capable of some impression.

In the dialogue, I have essayed so far to preserve the style of thought and expression which should distinguish each individual, as that the different speeches might be assigned to their proper speakers, without the assistance of the names at the head of them.

I think I see you smile at this *modest* attempt of an author, to point out the merits of his work ;—but you will recollect, that I speak,

not of what *I have done*, but of what I have *endeavoured to do*.

Whether I have done any thing worthy of attention, or not, you are too good a judge in these matters, to be influenced by an idle preface to a long play.

Believe me, dear Sir,

With much respect and esteem
Very sincerely, Yours,

M. A. SHEE.

CHARLES KEMBLE, ESQ.

In the above letter, the reader will have observed an unstudied statement of those principles of tragic composition which, I conceived, might be advantageously attended to, in the production of dramatic effect.*

* I have been much gratified to find my ideas on this subject, corroborated and improved, in an able work by Mr. M'Dermot, recently published under the title of "A Philosophical Enquiry into the source of the Pleasures derived from Tragic Representations." The "Letters to the Dramatists of the Day" published with the signature of Lacy, in the London Magazine, also appear to me to contain many judicious observations.

A desire to see how far I was capable of carrying these principles into operation, led me to amuse with my pen, those evening hours of relaxation which the labours of the pencil could not employ. As neither my reading, nor my recollection, furnished me with a story calculated for the developement of the objects I had in view, I determined to construct one, suited to my purpose, and consistent with my wish to employ in it, as many virtuous agents, as might be gracefully put in action, through the five allotted portions of dramatic space.

As I proposed, in the character of Alasco, to give an example of public, as well as private virtue, it was necessary to make him a patriot, and to place him in circumstances calculated to call forth the noblest passion of man,—the love of his country. But he is a patriot according to the old established standard;—made up by the regular prescription approved of in all ages. He is no jacobinical sprout from the luxuriant stem of diseased phi-

losophy ;—no factious demagogue, railing himself into vulgar repute, that he may enhance the value of the virulence which he means to bring to market. He is no leveller of rank and degree ;—no political enthusiast seeking for a new era of human felicity, in a community of goods, or the panacea of an Agrarian law :—he is a nobleman of high spirit and honourable feelings ;—indignant at the ruin of his country, and ready to sacrifice his life, and his love, in her defence ;—unwilling, however, to rouse the inert and sluggish mass of his fellow sufferers, to an exertion which must be always premature, when not spontaneous ;—reluctant to disturb the torpid tranquillity of those who can be content to slumber in the noxious shade of despotism.

In the part of Walsingham, I have attempted to draw the character of a brave, loyal, and generous soldier,—distinguished by the noblest sentiments that can be generated in a high-minded reverence for his ancient race ;—

sacrificing all considerations to an exalted sense of duty, estimating loyalty to his sovereign, as the paramount virtue of a soldier, and displaying a proud sense of honor, which, I trust, will not be considered unworthy of the nation to which his name has assigned him.

In contrasting these two characters, I was desirous to shew, that virtuous minds may take opposite views of the most important objects;—that we may differ on religion and politics, without meriting acrimonious censure, or malignant imputation; and that as long as our lives are exemplary, and our actions upright, our motives should be judged with candour, and even our prejudices respected.

In Conrad, I have sought to exemplify the virtues of gratitude, fidelity, and friendship, combined with rough honesty that detests all artifice, and a careless courage that revolts from cruelty.

Jerome is a friar;—a character not in favour on the English stage. I have ventured, however,

to depart from the established model, and as I conceive the interests of religion are ill served, by misrepresenting any class of those who are devoted to its duties, I have made Jerome, what I conceive a priest should always be—a minister of peace; without bigotry or superstition; too just to be prejudiced against those who differ from him in faith; and too sincere in the exercise of his functions, not to be the fearless defender of innocence and virtue.

Hohendahl and Malinski have been sacrificed to the necessities of dramatic effect, but to the first is given the only virtue compatible with his agency in the scene,—dauntless bravery. The latter, though the only character of unmixed evil in the play, is made to be conducive to its general moral impression, as an illustration of the maxim, that no confidence can be placed in the public spirit of him, who disregards the obligations of private virtue.

Amantha, who may be said to be the only female character in the play, I leave to speak in

her own defence.—I owe too much of the little felicity which the cares of life have allowed me, to the influence of that amiable portion of our species to which she belongs, not to have been ardently solicitous to shew my gratitude in this well intended, but weak and inadequate sketch of their virtues.

She has had the good fortune, however, to escape the political scrutiny of the Licensor, though she appears, on one or two occasions, to have scandalized his piety, by interjectional indecorum.

Thus have I traced the origin and object of a work, respecting which, I should consider it presumption to utter one word, if circumstances had not attracted to it a degree of attention, which, otherwise, it would never have excited.

No man can be more keenly sensible than I am, that in expatiating to such an extent, on matters so insignificant and uninteresting, I am putting the candour and kindness of my readers

to a very severe test. But I have too much respect for public opinion,—I am too much alive to the value of moral estimation, in every sphere of life, not to vindicate what little portion of it I may be justly entitled to, even at the risk of being thought to have overdone my defence.

So far am I from believing, that my production contains a single expression inconsistent with the just respect which is due to the happiest system of civil policy of which, perhaps, the history of civilized man affords us any example,* that were I, in my humble station,

* That the opinion here expressed has not been now, for the first time, brought forward to answer a present purpose, I beg leave to show by the following lines, which were written by me, many years ago, and published in the Sun Newspaper, at the period to which they refer. They were afterwards set to music by Mr. Major, and dedicated by that gentleman, to the Prince Regent.

1

From the war-wasted scene where oppression bears sway,
And of freedom, no more foil'd philosophy raves ;
Where life in the palsy of fear pines away,
And the Tyrant still triumphs, surrounded by slaves ;

authorized to approach the throne, I should, without hesitation, lay "ALASCO" at the feet of my Sovereign, as a testimony of my reverence for the mild sway of a constitutional king, and

To Britain his eye turns exulting to own
The blest region where man bears an aspect sublime,
Where a king wields the sceptre of law from a throne,
Which by liberty built, stands the wonder of time.

2

Look back to those ages so vaunted of yore ;
Where has liberty shone with a lustre so pure ?
Where has man been so free or so happy before,
Or has less felt those ills which all mortals endure ?
While the wrecks of proud empires lie scatter'd around,
And the tempest still raging, drives dark o'er the plain,
Unshaken the bulwarks of Britain are found,
And undaunted her sons on the land and the main.

3

To be free, is our birthright, our pride and our boast ;
'Tis the Charter achieved by the blood of our sires ;
And as long as the Ocean encircles her coast,
Shall old England be free, while their spirit inspires.
Or abroad, or at home, then what foes should we fear,
While our hearts are our Country's,—our swords are our own !
While our rights we maintain, and our King we revere,
While we hold to the laws, and stand fast by the throne !

as a tribute of my gratitude for the generous interest which his Majesty has never failed to take, in the peace, the union, and the prosperity of my native country.

As a literary production, I submit my Tragedy to the public, with the humblest impression of its merits. In a career of literature, perhaps, the most arduous, that can be opened to the ambition of a poet, it would be more than presumption in me to suppose that I could gain those laurels, which have been so fastidiously withheld from the proudest talents of the day. With respect to the moral and political character of my work, I must, however, take leave to speak with more confidence; and, at the moment when I am about to furnish my reader with the means of convicting me, if I am wrong, I do not hesitate to re-assert, what neither the Lord Chamberlain nor his deputy has ventured to deny; “that it contains not one sentiment, moral, religious or

“political, of which an honest subject of this
“empire can justly disapprove, or which any
“honorable man of any party, should be
“ashamed to avow.”

To the discredit of being a bad writer (should it be my fate to be so considered) I shall submit with silent resignation; but the charge of being an immoral one,* I repel with the indignation which belongs to an integrity which has never been before impeached.

To the literature of the day, and the liberal spirits by which its interests are so honorably upheld, I now leave the task of defending a territory, in which I am but an interloper—without any regular character or establishment. As an artist, I have a retreat within my own province—a claim of settlement in the parish of *virtù*. In the arts, thank heaven! there is no official critic appointed to snatch the pencil

* What writer can be more immoral than he who makes the press or the stage a vehicle for disseminating sentiments injurious to the moral, religious, or political interests of his Country?

from our hands, and dash out the delinquencies of taste. On the graphic stage, we may exhibit what we please. We have to encounter the connoisseur, indeed, but we are safe from the Licenser; for though we have censors enough to point out our misdeeds, we have none authorized to suppress them. We may paint the Saracen's head, without being thought personal to the Grand Turk, and pourtray tyrants grim as death, without being convicted of a libel on the Holy Alliance, and punished by the authority of the Lord Chamberlain.

Whatever may be the demerits of my work, the reader will find in it, no disguised attacks on the constituted authorities of my country;—no sly assaults on Church or State. He will find in it, no vulgar virulence against the great in rank or station;—no sour infusion of democratic discontent, adulterating the spirit of my composition with plebeian bitterness against the existence of privileges which we too often censure, only because we cannot share. He will

find no studiously concerted allusions to the parties or politics of the day ; neither whig nor tory will find his account in it. Had I made my play, like “ Gustavus Vasa,” the vehicle of a pointed satire on kings and priests ; or, like “ Edward and Eleonora,” an instrument of factious hostility against the Court and the Ministry of the day, even then, its suppression, like that of the productions here mentioned, would be a measure of little dignity, and perhaps less discretion. * It would be, however, accounted for, if not excused, in a consideration of human weakness operating on irritated authority. It is not every man, or every minister, that is qualified to say with Burke, that he could “ live down the calumnies of his enemies,” and it requires a dignified consciousness

* Even the loyal and moral Johnson, in his *Lives of the Poets*, when alluding to the fate of those two productions, observes, that it is difficult to discover on what grounds they were suppressed.

of desert, to be able to despise malevolence, and disregard censure.

But the reader will discover no manifestations of this objectionable nature, in the Tragedy of "ALASCO." I trust, however, he will find in it, a sincere desire to uphold the maxims of public and private morality; an uncompromising zeal to promote the interests of freedom and virtue. He may not find in it the qualities of a good tragedy, or a great poet, but he will find in it the principles of an honest man, and a good subject; principles, which only oppressors can be interested to discountenance, and only parasites will be forward to disavow.

In the observations which I have here thought it my duty to make, I have avoided all reference to the gentleman who fills the office of Licensor or Examiner of Plays, except in his official character. In this matter, I know him only as a public officer, by whose act I conceive myself to be aggrieved. It is but justice to

him to state, that no personal feeling towards me could have influenced his conduct on the present occasion. My name, as the author of "ALASCO" was communicated only to Mr. Kemble, and there can be no doubt that my secret was safe in his honorable keeping.

Whether the new Licensor be the person who can most becomingly put in force the utmost rigour of the authority with which he is invested, is a question which I shall not voluntarily discuss. Its decision could not alter my case, even though it were to aggravate his; and if he shall be thought to have done his duty, I do not desire to detract from his merit, by retrospective scrutiny, or irrelevant accusation.

Cavendish Square, March 10, 1824.

REMONSTRANCE, addressed to the Lord Chamberlain,
respecting the conduct of his Deputy, in refusing to
permit the representation of "ALASCO."

*Copy of a Letter to his Grace the Duke of Montrose,
dated 16th February, 1824.*

MY LORD DUKE,

THE manner in which the authority possessed by your Grace, as Lord Chamberlain, and Licenser of Dramatic Representations in this country, has been recently exercised by your Grace's Deputy, supplies at once my motive, and, I trust, my excuse, for the liberty I take in addressing to your Grace, the following statement.

Your Grace's high character for just and liberal feeling precludes the possibility of a doubt, that the appeal of the humblest individual who may be, or who may think himself aggrieved under the sanction of your exalted name and station, will meet with attention, at least, if it should fail of obtaining redress.

I am, my Lord, the author of the Tragedy of "ALASCO," which has been for some time in rehearsal at Covent Garden Theatre.

At the moment when the flattering reception of my play by the manager, and the favorable expectations

formed concerning it, by those who had an opportunity of judging of its merits, led me to entertain the highest hopes of its success, I was informed, that your Grace's Deputy had refused to offer it for your official sanction, unless the author submitted to such extraordinary and unparalleled mutilations of his work, as would render it as inconsistent in sense, as ridiculous in representation.

The tragedy in question, is the only attempt at dramatic composition that I have ever made.

Literature is not my occupation, though it has afforded me an agreeable, and I trust, not discreditable relaxation from the toils of an anxious and laborious profession. I am, my Lord, an Artist, and have had for many years the honor of being a Royal Academician of the Royal Academy of Arts.

Were I fortunate enough to be known to your Grace, I should be relieved from the necessity of asserting, that neither my character, my habits, nor my principles, can justly expose me to the suspicion of using either the stage, or the press, as a medium for conveying to the public, a single word, thought, or sentiment, which, by any rational interpretation, could be considered inimical to the moral, religious, or political interests of my country.

Conscious of the purity of my intentions, and convinced of the unexceptionable character of my work, my

surprise was great, when I found that it contained sentiments, which the Official Guardian of these great interests, as far as the stage is concerned, had thought it necessary to suppress.

This is an imputation, my Lord, to which it is impossible I can silently submit.—I owe it to my own character, as a subject of the government under which I live,—as a member of the respectable Institution to which I have the honor to belong,—and to my station, in which I have had the honor to be raised, by diploma from its royal and venerable founder; I owe it to the interests of my family, and the preservation of my good name, not to acquiesce in a decision, which would attempt to stamp me as the factious propagator of principles calculated to produce such dangerous consequences to the political institutions of this free country, as required so harsh and unusual an interposition of your Grace's authority, to prevent. As I have reason to believe that your Grace has not seen the production in question, I am bound, in the first instance, to appeal to your wisdom and justice, against the judgment of your Deputy. Your Grace's liberality will not deem the time mis-employed, which may enable you to judge of the policy and propriety of his agency, on this occasion—which may enable you to correct it, if it should be considered erroneous, or to sanc-

tion it, if it should be deemed just.—I ask no favour at your Grace's hands ; obscure an individual as I am, I am neither so unknown nor so unfriended, but that I might hope to gain admission to your Grace, through the interference of those whose influence might favorably present my claims to your attention ; but I should be sorry to seek by solicitation, that redress, to which the integrity of my intentions, and the justice of my cause give me a more honorable claim.—I appeal to your Grace, as to a great public officer, anxious to discharge with liberality and sound discretion, the duties which his exalted station prescribes—duties, in which are involved the interests of literature, and the very existence of the Drama, as an object of national pleasure or pride.

If your Grace should honor me by perusing my play, you will find it a production, which, however feeble as to its literary pretensions, I boldly assert, contains not one sentiment, moral, religious, or political, of which an honest subject of this empire can justly disapprove, or which any honorable man of any party should be ashamed to avow.—You will find it a production, in which there is not one sentiment, one line, or one word, disrespectful to kings, or unfavorable to monarchy or legitimate government of any description. You will find it a production, in which, neither in intention nor ex-

pression, neither by allusion nor implication, is there the slightest attempt to call in question, censure, or satirize the government, constitution, or laws of this country ;— to throw any discredit on its institutions, or cast the least aspersion on those who are concerned in their administration. On the contrary, your Grace will find, in that production, an humble, but honest endeavour, in every page, to inculcate the practice of public and private virtue. You will find many passages which advocate a high-minded reverence for royal authority—you will find the virtue of loyalty in particular, and the fidelity of a soldier to his sovereign, exemplified and illustrated, in the noblest character of an officer and an Englishman, which it was in the power of the author's imagination to conceive, and expressed in language, which may, indeed, be easily excelled in poetical power, but which, I will venture to say, for integrity of intention, and dramatic good faith, has never been surpassed.

These are claims, my Lord, which might justly entitle an author to expect for his production, a more indulgent reception than that which mine has experienced, even were it found to contain some passages of a character similar to those expressions of immoral, sanguinary, and insurrectionary sentiments, which nevertheless have not been thought to require the interference of a Lord Chamber-

lain, and which are, every season, listened to without disapprobation, or any discernible ill-consequence, in the tragedy of “ Venice Preserved,”* and other dramatic productions. But very different has been my fate. In-

* The following are some of the passages in “ Venice Preserved,” here alluded to.

ACT II.

JAFFIER.

Could I kill with curses,
By Heaven, I know not thirty heads in Venice,
Should not be blasted !—Senators should rot
Like dogs on dunghills. Oh, for a curse
To kill with !

ACT II.—line 227.

JAFFIER.

Command this steel, if you would have it quiet
Into this breast, but if you think it worthy
To cut the throats of reverend rogues in robes,
Send me into the cursed assembled senate.
It shrinks not, though I meet a father there.
Would you behold the city flaming ? Here 's
A hand shall bear a lighted torch at morn
To th' arsenal, and set its gates on fire !

ACT III.—line 63.

JAFFIE .

Nay, the throats of the whole senate
Shall bleed, my Belvidera. He, amongst us,
That spares his father, brother, or his friend,
Is damn'd.

deed, the unsparing mutilation, the minute political purification which my tragedy has undergone, from the microscopic scrutiny, the lacerating alacrity, and alarmed moral zeal of the new dramatic censor, would seem to indicate that a new era had opened for the stage—that new principles of censure were to signalize the new ap-

ACT III.—line 227.

RENAULT.

But above all, I charge you,
Shed blood enough ; spare neither sex nor age,
Name nor condition : if there lives a senator
After to-morrow, though the dullest rogue
That e'er said nothing, we have lost our ends.
If possible, let's kill the very name
Of senator, and bury it in blood.

ACT III.—line 251.

RENAULT.

Without the least remorse then, lets resolve
With fire and sword t' exterminate these tyrants
Under whose weight this wretched country labours.

ACT IV. Scene in the Senate.

PIERRE.

Cursed be your senate, cursed your constitution !
The curse of growing factions and divisions,
Still vex your councils, shake your public safety,
And make the robes of government you wear,
Hateful to you, as these base chains to me.

pointment, and that henceforward, every sentiment of political liberality and patriotic virtue,—every expression which could be construed into a disapprobation of tyranny, usurpation, and oppression,—even the very words “tyrant,” “despot,” “slave,” “shackle,” and “chain,” however introduced, accompanied, or recommended, should be considered as an inexpressible offence against the new code of dramatic decorum, and visited by the vengeance of theatrical exclusion.

My respect for your Grace’s wisdom as a minister, and liberality as a man, will not allow me to believe, for a moment, in the possibility, that such a system can be adopted in these enlightened times, and in this free country.

Considering the character of the age in which we live, and the practice of that tempered rule by which we have been hitherto governed, I cannot be persuaded, that your Grace will readily sanction the policy of holding forth to the public of this great empire, that they cannot be trusted to hear the language of freedom uttered in dramatic representation. That sentiments expressing the most tempered and general condemnation of tyranny and oppression, are considered as calculated to make them discontented or disaffected, under a system of lawful sway and just authority; that, in short, the

hero, and the patriot, are to be interdicted on our stage, as characters of fearful influence, and dangerous example; and that the vigour of our national drama, so long the boasted organ of manly sentiment, and liberal principles, must be, henceforward, emasculated to a tame, spiritless, and hypocritical exhibition of poetical subservience and political servility.—Your Grace's enlightened mind will rather prefer, in the administration of your important office, the adoption of maxims different from those which must lead the dramatic writers of our day to infer the existence of intentions so unfavourable to their interests, on the part of those authorities, whose sanction is essential to their success. You will not think it just, or politic, to treat their productions with a severity unparalleled since the days of "Gustavus Vasa," and unexampled in the practice of states, less free in their institutions, and less liberal in their principles.—Your Grace will see the true enemies of public order, and national contentment, in those who would stimulate the temper of legitimate power, to the suspicious irritability which belongs to conscious misrule—who would persuade the organs of public authority, that the just censure of universally acknowledged tyranny abroad, was a dangerous masked battery opened against rational and regular government at home, and who would de-

grade, libel, and vilify a constitutional sovereign, and a free system, by the slanderous supposition that they can be satirized, or in any manner endangered by the most open and indignant reprobation of rapine, usurpation or oppression.

I have, my Lord, expressed myself warmly, but I hope respectfully, on this point, because, conscious of the honesty of my intentions, and the innoxious character of my work, I feel that I have been injured in my interests, and unjustly deprived of my fair share of whatever profit or reputation, my tragedy was calculated to produce.

I am, my Lord, the father of a large family; I have sons, whom it has been my highest ambition to educate in the principles of honor and virtue—to make good christians, good subjects, and good men. I trust they will never have cause to blush for the conduct, or opinions of their father; and I thus respectfully, but earnestly protest against a decision, which holds me out, as the author of a work of immoral tendency—a work, which inculcates sentiments dangerous to the peace, order, and civil policy of my country, which calls for so unusual an intervention of your Grace's authority, and merits the stigma of official reprobation.

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With many apologies for this long, but I hope, not
inexcusable trespass on your Grace's attention,

I have the honor to be,

With the most profound respect,

My Lord Duke,

Your Grace's

Most obedient and most humble servant,

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE.

To this letter of remonstrance, his Grace the Duke of
Montrose returned the following answer.

(*Copy.*)

Grosvenor Square, 19th February, 1824.

SIR,

THINKING Mr. Colman a very sufficient judge of
his duty, and as I agree in his conclusion, (from the ac-
count he has given me of the Tragedy, called "ALASCO,")
I do conclude, that at this time, without considerable
omissions, the Tragedy should not be acted; and whilst
I am persuaded, that your intentions are upright, I
conceive that it is precisely for this reason, (though it
may not strike Authors) that it has been the wisdom of
the Legislature to have an Examiner appointed, and
power given to the Chamberlain of the Household, to
judge, whether certain plays should be acted at all, or
not acted at particular times.

I do not mean to enter into an argument with you, Sir, on the subject; but think that your letter, conceived in polite terms to me, calls upon me to return an answer, shewing that your Tragedy has been well considered.

I remain, Sir, with esteem,

Your obedient servant,

MONTROSE.

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE, Esq.

&c. &c. &c.

Conceiving it possible, that the Lord Chamberlain. might not have contemplated the publication of his letter, I thought it my duty to give his Grace the following express intimation of my intention respecting it.

(Copy)

Cavendish Square, Thursday, Feb. 19, 1824

MY LORD DUKE,

I HAVE this day received your Grace's answer to the appeal which I had the honor to address to your Grace, respecting the tragedy of "ALASCO," and I beg leave respectfully to offer my acknowledgments for the promptitude and politeness with which your Grace's decision has been communicated to me.

I considered myself bound, in a matter so important to my honor and my interest, to address your Grace in your official capacity, conceiving that the Lord Chamberlain, before he gave his sanction to so harsh and injurious a measure as that which has excluded my Tragedy from the stage, might possibly think it his duty to resort to some other criterion of its demerits, than the report of the Officer whose judgment was called in question before him. Your Grace's official reply has undeceived me in this particular, and renders it improper for me to trespass farther on your Grace's time and attention, than by the respectful intimation, that I propose, in due time, to submit my appeal, with your Grace's answer, to the inspection of the Public.

I have the honor to be,

With the most profound respect,

My Lord Duke,

Your Grace's most obedient,

And most humble servant,

MARTIN ARCHER SHEE.

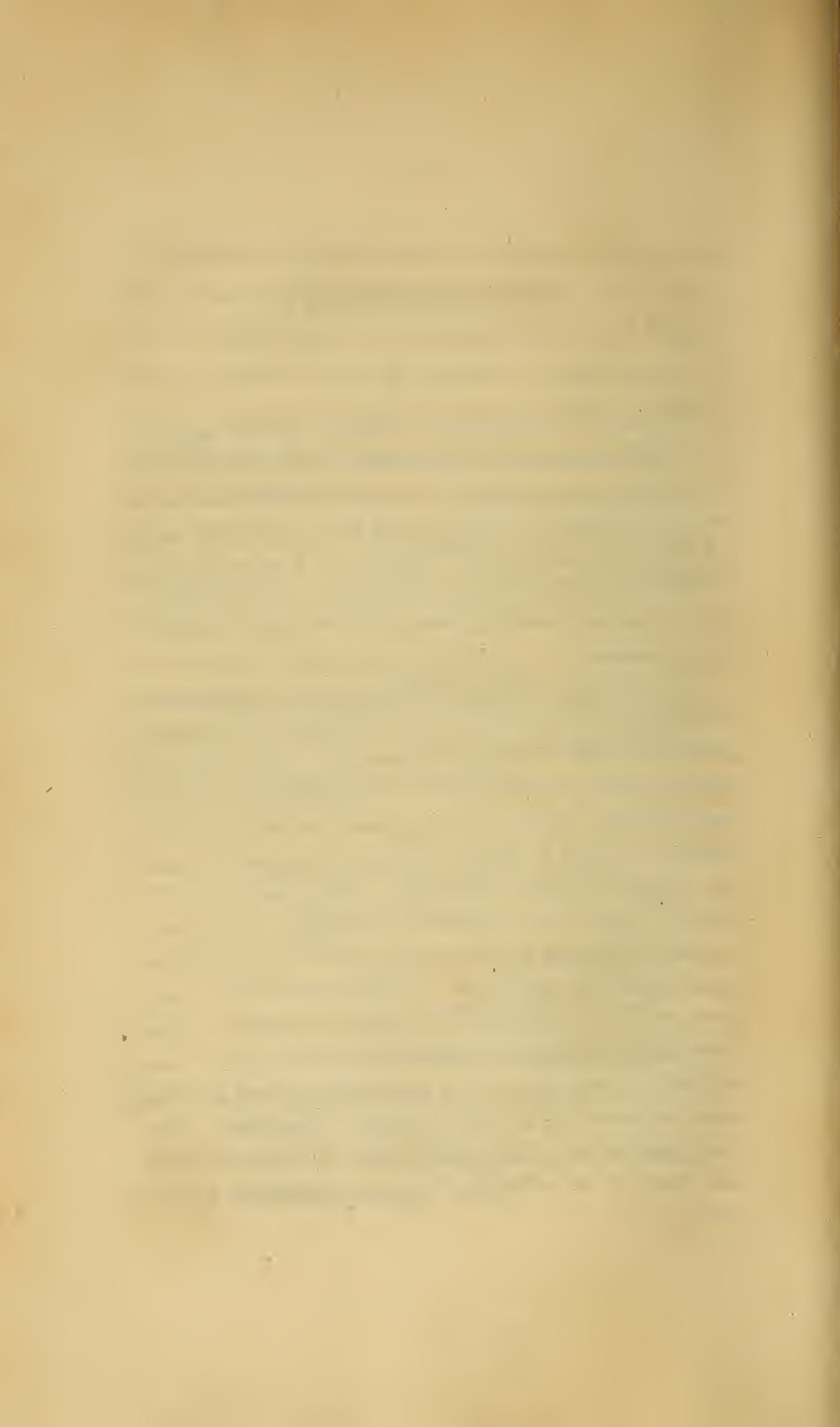
His Grace the Duke of Montrose, &c. &c.

To this letter the Lord Chamberlain did not do me the honor to make any reply.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE reader is requested to observe, that the passages in the following tragedy, which have been condemned by the Licensor, are printed in *Italics*. The authority upon which they are thus pointed out, is an official copy of the play, sent by the Manager of Covent Garden Theatre to the Licensor, and returned by that officer, with his erasures marked in red ink—this copy is now in my possession.

The passages distinguished by inverted commas were omitted by me, in the copy for the Theatre, in order to reduce the Play within the necessary acting limits;—having taken the Tragedies of Shakspeare, in Johnson and Steevens's edition, as my guide, in judging of the length to which I should extend my composition; and not being aware how much they were curtailed for the stage, I was led into the error of writing nearly one thousand lines more than could be admitted within the usual limits of an acting play. I feel myself called upon, however, in consideration of the circumstances which have attended my production, to publish it as it was originally composed,—not a line omitted,—not a sentiment softened,—not a word changed or suppressed; that the utmost extent of my delinquency,—“the very head and front of my offending,” may be submitted to the public.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

BARON HOHENDAHL—*Governor of a Polish Province.*

COUNT ALASCO—*A young Polish Nobleman.*

COLONEL WALSINGHAM—*An Englishman in the Prussian Service.*

CONRAD—*A friend of Count Alasco's, and a leader of the Insurgents.*

MALINSKI	}	<i>Polish Chiefs.</i>
RIENSKI		
BRANIKI		

SWARTSBURG—*An Officer of Hohendahl's.*

JEROME—*Prior of the Abbey.*

RUDOLPHO—*The Baron's Game-keeper.*

AMANTHA—*Walsingham's Daughter.*

BERTHA—*her Attendant.*

Polish Insurgents, Scouts, Guards, Attendants, &c.

SCENE—*Poland.*



A L A S C O :

A TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Day-break—the entrance of a cavern—a Peasant armed with a pike, as on guard—a shrill whistle is heard to sound at a distance—the Guard looks out eagerly, and answers by a corresponding signal—a number of Peasants armed with different weapons are immediately seen in the distance, winding down among the rocks—they enter at the front of the stage, headed by two of their chiefs, Conrad and Malinski.

CONRAD (*speaking to one of the Peasants.*)

CALL in the scouts—

By Heaven, the moon's a prodigal to-night,
And showers her silver lavishly.

MALINSKI.

'Tis the dawn

That breaks above the hill.

CONRAD.

Why, what's the hour ?

MALINSKI.

Four, by the Abbey clock.

CONRAD.

Then we again

Have loiter'd at our sport.—But who comes here,
Outstripping haste ?

[*Enter a scout, hastily.*]

“ Why, comrade, if thy news

“ Should wear but half the importance of thy face,

“ We must have a gazette for it. If thou'st breath,

“ Proclaim.”

SCOUT.

As posted on the hill I stood,
Close housed within the hollow of an oak,
I heard a rustling in the brake below me ;
When, on the instant, flashing from a cloud,
The moon cut sharp upon the forest wall
The shadow of a man ; crouching he seemed,
And stole his cautious way, as if he knew
The place no solitude : I darted forth,
And at a venture sent this trusty pike
Upon the search before me ;—it fell short ;
When he, up-springing at the noise, flew off,
And bounding o'er the crumbled fence, escaped me.

MALINSKI.

A spy, no doubt, of Hohendahl's,

CONRAD.

"No matter ;

"We can't so smother a fire but it will smoke,

"Or some sharp nose shall snuff it in the wind."

Canst throw a guess at him ?

SCOUT.

His sudden flight,

Baffling all near approach, concealed him from me ;

But at the moment, Rudolph crossed my mind,

The Baron's game-keeper.

MALINSKI.

'Twas he, most likely.

CONRAD.

Well, let him to the Baron with his tale !

The flame has spread beyond his power to quench,

And soon shall scorch him.

But now, my friends and comrades, to your homes !

And though your wrongs are throbbing at your hearts,

Repress the impatient spirit, and await

The hour of vengeance, now so near at hand.

**What little skill the patriot sword requires,*

* *What little skill, &c.*—Here our new licenser commences his operations; here the vigilant guardian of the public weal,—the judicious Dogberry of the new dramatic police, first springs the rattle of

*Our zeal may boast, in midnight vigils schooled.
Those deeper tactics, well contrived to work
The mere machine of mercenary war,
We shall not need, whose hearts are in the fray,—
Who for ourselves, our homes, our country, fight,
And feel in every blow, we strike for freedom.*
Bestow your weapons safe within the cave,
And then disperse in silence.

*[They place their arms within the cave, and dis-
perse. Conrad and Malinski remain.]*

CONRAD.

Now, my friend,
Our project ripens—every district round
Has answered, “ Ready ;” and when next we meet
In our cave-cabinet, we fix the fate
Of Poland. Are the leaders summoned ?

MALINSKI.

All.

“ ’Twould seem the governor is on the alert,
“ And doubtless his inspector will, to-night,
“ Report us fit for service.

CONRAD.

“ If he does,
“ We’ll justify his praise, and prove our mettle.”

his function, and proceeds to “ comprehend ” such “ auspicious ” passages as the above, which he declares “ flat burglary as ever was committed.”

MALINSKI.

But where's our chief, Alasco? "If we rest
"On him, as our best guide in this great enterprize,"
It seems full time he shew himself amongst us.

CONRAD.

You'll find the Count Alasco at his post,
When fit occasion serves, or danger calls him.

MALINSKI.

"Why, truly, not to dwell on cramps or tooth-aches,
Methinks some dangers hang about our heads,
In these chill midnight hatchings of revolt,
Which 'twould become his chivalry to share,
For lack of nobler peril.

CONRAD.

You sneer, Malinski,
And grow cynical; but let your wit be wise—
I am Alasco's friend.

MALINSKI.

Why, so am I.—

I trust we're all his friends. But to be plain,
His absence grows mysterious—'tis remarked,
And breeds distrust in our confederates.

CONRAD.

Distrust! Of whom?

MALINSKI.

Of him—of you—of me.
Once give suspicion wing—she flies at random.

CONRAD.

The strong assurance of his heart and hand,
You've had from *me* ; are *you* disposed to question it ?

MALINSKI.

No ; but 'twere well, if yet some farther proof
His presence had supplied, known as he is,
By close alliance linked with Walsingham,
That haughty Briton, *who would forge for us,*
** The shackles his brave countrymen have scorned.*

CONRAD.

Malinski, I perceive 'tis studied in you,
To deal out dark suspicions of Alasco
“ You gather up surmises, odds and ends
“ Of gossip tales, that sly Detraction drops
“ In Envy's ear, to slur his shining worth,
“ And burn, with caustic tongue, a slander on him ;”
But mark me well ;—by Heaven, I will not brook
A hint or hesitation of distrust,
To hang upon the honor of my friend.

MALINSKI.

Nay, hear me, Conrad.

CONRAD.

No, I'll hear no more ;
You've dared to tell me you distrust Alasco.

* In the licenser's copy, the passage runs thus :—

“ *Those chains his nobler countrymen have broken*

“ *On their oppressors' heads.*”

Altered to the present reading, on account of the measure.

MALINSKI.

Dared to tell you !

CONRAD.

Yes, dared !—another tongue
So daring had been answer'd by my sword.
If you doubt him, disband—disband at once,
And dream no more of freedom.

MALINSKI.

Come, you're hot,
Beyond the occasion here.

CONRAD.

Without his aid,
What are your hopes ? Or have you hearts so bold,
'To look an order'd battle in the face,
With your mob militant—your half-drill'd hordes,—
The raw materials merely of revolt,
With headlong zeal obstructing their own strength,
And scatter'd by the first rough blast of war
That rattles round their banners ?

MALINSKI.

“ Were the time
“ At leisure, Conrad, for a private brawl,
“ I might indulge your humour, and take up
“ The quarrel your rough spirit would provoke ;
“ But now, no idle breeze shall ruffle me.”
I know Alasco's value to our cause,

As well as you, and therefore freely spoke,
Not in distrust, but jealous apprehension.

CONRAD.

A truce, then, with your doubts and deep conjectures,
Nor mutiny thus in murmurs 'gainst your chief.
Alasco is our country's pride and hope—
Her best—her last resource. “ His life unfolds
“ A glorious code of honor and high virtue,
“ To fix the law of true nobility,
“ And regulate the bearing of a prince.

MALINSKI.

“ There is no need, my friend, to brandish thus
“ Your zeal in his defence.” I own his worth,
“ And never meant to question it.”

CONRAD.

“ Your hand !”

I know I'm hasty when Alasco's touch'd ;
He made me what I am—my mother nursed him ;
With more than brother's love we grew together ;
He shared with me his studies and his sports ;
“ Still cheer'd me in the sunshine of his fortunes,”
And from his follower, raised me to his friend.
“ Nay, deeper still, Malinski, I am his debtor ;
“ The life I value little, but as pledged
“ With thine in this last struggle for our country,
“ His valour saved.

MALINSKI.

“ How so ?

CONRAD.

“ Destined to camps,

“ Since he could grasp a sword, I followed him

“ With faithful step—the comrade of his choice—

“ Through many a rough encounter, sharing still

“ His heart and hope ; but, in a skirmish once,

“ A furious Cossack, charging with his pike,

“ Unhorsed me ere I well could meet the shock :

“ Stunn’d by the fall, and bleeding as I lay,

“ The foe prepared to plunder and dispatch me ;

“ When, like a lion, springing to my aid,

“ Alasco felled the savage at a blow,

“ Withstood, till succour came, a storm of war,

“ And bore me off in safety.

MALINSKI.

“ Such a service

“ Merits well your zeal ; he’s brave and generous.

CONRAD.

“ Brave ! I have known him in the ranks of war,

“ Perform such feats, while yet a stripling boy,

“ As but to think on, would have stirr’d the heart

“ Of veteran valour. But let us hence, my friend ;”—

The day of trial comes, to prove us all :

If *we* stand firm, Alasco will not fail ;

Let us be men, we’ll find in him a hero.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

The Hall of a Monastery.

Enter ALASCO, and the PRIOR JEROME.

JEROME.

Beware, my friend, lest youthful passion prompt
Thy discontent with Walsingham—in him,
The father's heart beats strongly, and awhile,
May hesitate to yield an only child,
E'en to a son like thee.

ALASCO.

O! wrong me not

By such a thought, good father! nor believe
I hold my passions in so loose a rein
That they should sway me in a cause like this.
Since first in presence of her dying mother,
Thy sacred office sealed Amantha mine,
Have I not patient, waived a husband's claim,
And waiting Walsingham's return, approached her,
As some fair vestal in a hallowed shrine,
For heavenly love reserved, and holy joy.

JEROME.

Most true, my son! thou may'st defy reproach;
But yet, it cannot be that Walsingham
Would fain deny thy suit.

ALASCO.

In words, perhaps,
He has not so expressed him, but 'tis plain,
Whate'er the cause, he meditates refusal.
He now looks coldly on me—cuts me short—
When I would urge his promise, with “well, well,
“Not now—some other time, we'll speak of this.”
And then, he talks at me, with studied speech,
And pointed emphasis—declaiming loud,
Against those sentiments he takes for mine,
Till chafed by his own vehemence, he swears,
The characters he most abhors on earth,
Are factious fools and firebrand patriots.

JEROME.

It is most strange ! He cannot, sure, forget
Thy claims upon him—from thy earliest years,
Adopted as his son—“each interval
“Of leisure left him from the toils of war,
“Employed with zeal, to form thee what thou art,
“An honor to thy country, and thy name.”
Why, 'twas the favourite boon he asked of heaven,
To see his daughter triumph in thy love,
And safe beneath the shelter of thy virtues.

ALASCO.

Blessed be the pious foresight that secured
By holy rites, our long affianced faith !

JEROME.

Let us, my son, more nobly deem of Walsingham ;
“ Some adverse current of the world, perhaps,
“ Has, for a moment, turned him from his course ;
“ But he will soon resume his former track,
“ As steady as before.” Full twenty years
Have told their flight, in furrows on my brow,
Since first, reluctant I beheld my niece,
My orphan care, united to his fortunes :
A soldier, foreign to our faith and country,
E’en piety, with prejudice combined,
To wake my fears, and cloud him with suspicion ;
But soon his virtues triumphed, and rebuked
The narrow bigotry of clime and sect ;
Though of an hasty, and impetuous spirit,
I have ever found him open, just, and generous,
The kindest father, and the best of husbands.

ALASCO.

“ To me, his guardian care has long supplied
“ A parent’s loss ; and ’twas my pride to think,
“ He meant to draw me nearer to his heart,
“ And bless me with Amantha.”
But see, she comes, the angel of my fate !

Enter AMANTHA.

The star that early lighted me to love,
And warmed my heart with all the beams of beauty !

But sure, some cloud has lately passed thy brow,
And left its sombre trace—How ! tears, Amantha ?

AMANTHA.

Alas, my friend ! I have much cause for sadness.
Methinks each day, a deeper gloom involves us.
Such dark forebodings hang about my heart,
That startled fancy, in the future sees
But vague mischance, and undefined disaster.

ALASCO.

O ! yield not to such visionary fears !
“ Heaven’s smile is on thee—all good angels guard
“ The hallowed steps of innocence and virtue.”
Art thou not mine beyond the reach of fate,
E’en by thy father’s early sanction mine,
Tho’ now he frowns and would withdraw his favor.

AMANTHA.

He would indeed ; I fear some envious tale
Has worked suspicion in his mind against thee.
“ Thy name, which he first taught my tongue to lisp,
“ And by his praises, stamped upon my heart,
“ Is grown distasteful to him, and he now
“ With rough impatience chides it from my lips :”
Of late, he holds close conference with Hohendahl,
An artful man, and not thy friend, Alasco.

ALASCO.

My friend, Amantha ! no, the enmity
Of knaves like him, an honest man may boast,

And take it as a tribute paid to virtue.

“ I’m honoured in his hate.”

JEROME.

Beware, my son,

“ Of Hohendahl ; you’ve given him that offence

“ The wicked never pardon—thwarted his

“ Bad passions—baffled and exposed his practices,

“ Till rage and shame have rankled in his heart,

“ To fiend-like malice.”

ALASCO.

“ I regard him not.”

AMANTHA.

A dread instinctive warns me to avoid him ;

My spirit shrinks at his approach, and feels

As fear of him were salutary foresight.

He now avows him suitor to my hand,

And boasts my father’s sanction.

ALASCO.

Hohendahl !

Impossible ! tho’ now unjust to me,

The generous soul of Walsingham would spurn

The alliance of a villain on a throne.

AMANTHA.

Then hear, my friend ! and judge—with solemn air,

Last night, my father called me to his chamber ;

And prefacing, as if with speech obscure,

To sound my inmost thoughts of Hohendahl,

He spoke of him, as one whose friendship claimed
High estimate, and rich return—he hoped
I had not idly pledged my heart too far,
To one unworthy of the gift, and where,
A father's blessing could not follow it.
Amazed—confounded—from my trembling lips
Thy name burst forth with such warm eulogy—
Such frank avowal of unshaken love,
“ The fruit of his own culture in our hearts,”
As proved I had nor power to change, nor will.

ALASCO.

And would thy father urge thee to betray me?

AMANTHA.

He is abused, my friend, and thou art slandered.
He thinks thee disaffected to the state,
A crime, with him, including all offence.
Thou knowest his rigid principles.

ALASCO.

I do.

My country's wrongs have been the only string
That ever jarred between us: but in his code,
The soldier's spirit breathes, and all is mutiny
That's not submission.

JEROME.

Do not fear, my children !

We know that Walsingham is not unjust,
Tho' warm and loyal as becomes a soldier ;

“ Nor should we marvel, if with hostile eye
“ He looks on all who thwart established rule.
“ Has he not seen the wreck of all his hopes,
“ In civil storms?—beheld his ancient house
“ Laid prostrate, and in fragments scattered wide :
“ While he, an exile, long at tug with fortune,
“ Survives, a martyr to the cause of kings,
“ And like a martyr, loves his faith the more.”
The present cloud dispersed, his generous heart
Will recognize again Alasco’s worth,
And all be well once more.

AMANTHA.

Alas ! ’tis plain,
He now has other views, and seems incensed,
“ Past sudden reconciliation : in his words,
“ There lurks some dreadful meaning, my Alasco ;
“ As if ill fate hung o’er thee, and thy course
“ Rushed madly onward to some desperate end,
“ Which claims his pity, while it wakes his wrath.”
He interdicts our farther intercourse,
And warns me, as I prize his peace and blessing,
To think of thee no more.

ALASCO.

Nay then, away
With indecision—thou art my wife, Amantha,
And I will instant claim thee at his hands.

JEROME.

My son, be not too hasty, nor forget
Thy promise to her sainted mother, made
E'en on that altar which received thy vows.

ALASCO.

Could I forget, or violate the trust
Reposed in me by that dear, dying saint,
I were the scorn of men—" but no, good Jerome !
" Her angel spirit prompts me from the skies,
" And warns me of my duty to her child.

AMANTHA.

" O ! when I think, how, with a parent's fondness,
" He would exulting, dwell upon thy worth,
" And prophecy the triumph of thy fortunes,
" I scarce can credit this disastrous change,
" That now o'erwhelms our hopes.

JEROME.

Apply once more
To Walsingham, and learn his last resolve :
If he reject thy suit, to favour Hohendahl,
Thy promise is absolved,—demand thy wife,
I will attest thy claim.

ALASCO.

Be it then so.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

A Room in the House of Col. Walsingham.

Enter WALSINGHAM and BARON HOHENDAHL with a paper in his hand.

WALSINGHAM.

Nay! my good Lord! you carry this too far:
Alasco leader of a band of rebels!
Impossible!

HOHENDAHL.

I have it here in proof:
Rebellion wears his livery, and looks big,
In promise of his aid: his followers
Are seen in midnight muster on our hills,
Rehearsing insurrection, and arrayed
In mimicry of war.

WALSINGHAM.

It cannot be!

By heaven it cannot be!—your spies deceive you.
I know the madness of the time has reached him,
And when the fit is on, like other fools,
He raves of liberty, and public rights:
But he would scorn to lead the low cabals,
Of vassal discontent, and vulgar turbulence.

HOHENDAHL.

My good old friend ! your loyal nature yields
Unwilling credence to such crimes as these ;
But I have marked Alasco well, and found,
Beneath the mask of specious seeming, still,
The captious critic of authority ;
Ready to clap sedition on the back,
And stir the very dregs, and lees of life,
To foam upon its surface—but I see,
The subject moves you.

WALSINGHAM.

Yes, it does, indeed !

His father was my friend, and fellow soldier ;
“ Our hearts united by the strong cement,
“ Of dangers braved, and hardships borne together.”
A braver spirit never laid his life
Upon his country’s altar. At my side
He fell—his wife and son, with his last breath,
Bequeathing to my care—a sacred trust,
Of half its duties speedily curtailed ;
For grief soon bowed the widow to her grave.
Sole guardian of Alasco, ’twas my pride,
To form him like his father—and indeed,
So apt, in honor and all worth he grew,
My wishes scarce kept pace with his advancement.
While yet a boy, I led him to the field,
And there, such gallant spirit he displayed,

That e'en the steady veteran in the breach,
Was startled at his daring—to be brief,—
I loved him as my son, and saw with joy,
His long avowed attachment to my daughter.

HOHENDAHL.

Did she return his love ?

WALSINGHAM.

He was her idol,
E'en from her earliest years,—her mother too,
From pious zeal to guard her daughter's faith,
Cherished their mutual passion, and beheld
Amantha's safety in Alasco's love.
But I have resolved, my friend—the loyalty
That e'en suspicion taints, shall find with me
No favour.

HOHENDAHL.

Fair Amantha is a prize
Too rich, to squander on this rash young man.

WALSINGHAM.

“ I have already warned her to avoid him.

HOHENDAHL.

“ 'Tis wisely done. But will the lady yield
“ To such constraint ?

WALSINGHAM.

“ I have ever found her gentle,
“ And most dutiful ; formed for all excellence,
“ On the mild model of her mother's virtues.

“ She is aware too, there’s a point in this,
“ That touches me most nearly—one, in which,
“ I least can brook resistance to my will.
“ The blood of Walsingham has long flowed pure,
“ Thro’ bosoms firm and loyal in all fortunes ;
“ And tho’ it grieve my heart, and blast at once,
“ The dearest hope I have cherished for my child,
“ If he have thus defiled his father’s name,
“ And loyalty, the soldier’s honour stained,
“ By Heaven ! I’ll cast him off from me and mine,
“ As one infected with foul leprosy,
“ And marked by fate, for infamy and ruin.

HOHENDAHL.

“ I must applaud your generous indignation,”
“ His courses are indeed, most dangerous ;”
But see, he comes.

Enter ALASCO.

WALSINGHAM.

You were our theme, Alasco.

ALASCO.

A subject, Sir, unworthy of discussion,
If slander have not given it a zest.

WALSINGHAM.

Slander, Alasco !

ALASCO.

Aye, Sir, slander’s abroad,
And busy, few escape her—she can take

All shapes—and sometimes, from the blistered lips
Of galled authority, will pour her slime
On all who dare dispute the claims of pride,
Or question the high privilege of oppression.

HOHENDAHL.

Your words seem pointed, Sir ; and splenetic.

ALASCO.

They're honest, my Lord, and you well understand them.

WALSINGHAM.

What means this heat, Alasco ? Innocence
Can fear no slander, and suspects no foe.

ALASCO.

He's on his guard, who knows his enemy,
And Innocence may safely trust her shield
Against an open foe ; but who's so mailed,
That slander shall not reach him ?—coward Calumny
Stabs in the dark—but I forget my purpose,
Your presence, Sir, (*to Walsingham*) represses all contention.

At some more fitting season, with your leave,
I have a suit that claims your private ear,
And much concerns us both.

WALSINGHAM.

Then speak it boldly ;
The baron is my friend—*perhaps, I guess

* In the stage copy, the following words (here omitted) occur.

“And much affects my interest and my daughter's?”

Your suit, and may at once, give answer to it.

ALASCO.

To guess my suit, yet wish it here disclosed,

Is answer unequivocal ; and as such,

I take it, for the present, and retire. [Going.

WALSINGHAM.

Alasco !—Count Alasco !

ALASCO (*returning*).

Sir, your pleasure ?

WALSINGHAM.

'Tis now methinks, some twenty years, or more,

Since that brave man, your father, and my friend,

While life scarce fluttered on his quivering lips,

Consigned your youthful fortunes to my care.

ALASCO.

And nobly, Sir, your generous spirit stands

Acquitted of that trust.

WALSINGHAM.

'Tis well !—perhaps,

I may assume, I've been Alasco's friend.

ALASCO.

My friend !—my father !—say, my more than father !

And let me still, with love and reverence pay

The duty of a son.

WALSINGHAM.

A son of mine,

Must be the soul of loyalty and honor :

A scion worthy of the stock he grafts on ;
No factious mouther of imagined wrongs,
To sting and goad the maddening multitude,
And set the monster loose for desolation.

ALASCO.

Is this to me ?—has slander gone so far,
As dare to taint the honor of Alasco ?

WALSINGHAM.

How suits it with the honor of Alasco,
To plot against his country's peace, and league
With low confederates, for a lawless purpose ?
Manœuvring miscreants in the forms of war,
And methodizing tumult ?

ALASCO.

Have I done this ?

WALSINGHAM.

How must it soothe thy father's hovering shade,
To hear his name, so long to glory dear,
Profaned and sullied in sedition's mouth,
The countersign of turbulence and treason ?

ALASCO.

“ Shade of my father hear ! am I so far
“ Degenerate from thy virtues—fallen below
“ The standard of thy worth, that I should thus,
“ Reproached and rated stand, a mark for scorn !
“ Have I in ought, beyond our nature's frailty,
“ Disturbed thy hallowed spirit in its bliss,

“ Or stained the name thou gav’st me, with dishonour?”

[*To Walsingham.*

The proud repulse that suits a charge like this,
Preferred by lips less revered, I forbear.

WALSINGHAM.

“ It was my pride to think thee brave and loyal—

“ A cast from honor’s ancient mould—a man,

“ Made up of all the attributes that mark

“ A noble race—that prove a generous blood,

“ And justify its privilege.

ALASCO.

“ I must grieve,

“ That sanguine expectation should so far

“ Outrun my feeble virtue—but when tried

“ By humbler estimate of worth—when weighed

“ In the just balance of all human weakness,

“ Where have I failed in aught that honor claims,

“ Or candour should require?”

WALSINGHAM.

Are you not stained

With foul disloyalty—a blot indelible?

Have you not practised on the senseless rabble,

Till disaffection breeds in every breast,

And spawns rebellion?

ALASCO.

No! by Heaven, not so!

With most unworthy patience have I borne

“ * My country’s ruin—seen an ancient state
 “ Struck down by sceptres—trampled on by kings ;
 “ And fraud and rapine registered in blood,
 “ As Europe’s public law, e’en on th’ authority
 “ Of thrones—this, have I seen—yes, like a slave,
 “ A coward, have I seen what well might burst
 “ The patriot’s heart, and from its scabbard force
 “ The feeblest sword that ever slumbered at
 “ A courtier’s side—yet have I never stirred”
 My country—never roused her sons to vengeance,
 But rather used the sway their love allowed me,
 To calm the boiling tumult of their hearts,
 Which else had chaf’d and foam’d to desperation.

* This is the passage, as originally composed for this place ; and though the author believes that there is not an honest man in the British empire, who will venture to assert that it is an overstrained or unjust reprobation of the event to which it alludes, yet, so desirous was he of avoiding all unnecessary animadversion on the conduct of sovereigns, that he altered the passage to the following lines in the copy, for the stage.

By Heaven, ’tis false,
With most unworthy patience have I seen
My country shackled, and her sons oppress’d,
And tho’ I’ve felt their injuries and avow
My ardent hope hereafter to avenge them,
 I never stirred, &c.

The author little suspected, that even this would be found too strong for the delicate stomach of the new examiner, and that it would be dashed out from his production, accordingly, as containing doctrines too dangerous to be listened to in a free country !!!

HOHENDAHL.

The state is much beholden to Alasco ;
And we, her humble instruments, must bow,
And to his interference owe our safety.

ALASCO.

*Tyrants, proud Lord, are never safe, nor should be ;
The ground is mined beneath them as they tread ;
Haunted by plots, cabals, conspiracies,
Their lives are long convulsions, and they shake,
Surrounded by their guards and garrisons.**

HOHENDAHL.

Your patriot care, Sir, would redress all wrongs
That spring from harsh restraints of law and justice.
Your virtue prompts you to make war on tyrants,
And like another Brutus free your country.

ALASCO.

Why, if there were *some sland'rous tool of state—
Some taunting, dull, unmanner'd deputy—
Some district despot†* prompt to play the Tarquin,

* In the new political morality of the Chamberlain's office, the expression of sentiments like these, is considered a capital offence. The sagacious depository of its powers, generously throws his shield over all tyrants, abstract or particular, ancient or modern, living or dead—and will not allow a whisper to their prejudice, or a supposition that they can be insecure.

† The reader will observe, that the word *despot* is no longer to be tolerated on the stage.

And make his power the pander to his lust,
By Heaven ! I well could act the Roman part,
And strike the brutal tyrant to the earth,
Although he wore the mask of Hohendahl.

HOHENDAHL.

Ha ! dar'st thou thus provoke me, insolent ! *[Draws.*

WALSINGHAM *(advancing between them.)*

Rash boy, forbear ! My Lord, you are too hasty.

ALASCO.

This roof is your protection from my arm.

WALSINGHAM.

Methinks, young man, a friend of mine might claim
More reverence at your hands.

ALASCO.

Thy friend ! by Heaven !

That sacred title might command my worship ;
But cover not with such a shield, his baseness ;—
His country's foe can be the friend of no man.

WALSINGHAM.

Alasco, this is wild and mutinous ;
An outrage, marking deep and settled spleen
To just authority.

ALASCO.

Authority !

Show me authority in honor's garb,
And I will down upon the humblest knee

That ever homage bent to sovereign sway :

But shall I reverence pride, and lust, and rapine ?

* *No. When oppression stains the robe of state,*

And power's a whip of scorpions in the hands

Of heartless knaves, to lash the o'erburthen'd back

Of honest industry, the loyal blood

Will turn to bitterest gall, and th' o'ercharged heart

Explode in execration.

* *But shall I reverence pride, and lust, and rapine ?*

"Yes," says our new Examiner, (at least, if we may judge by his eager erasure of the *negative*.) This, it seems, is dangerous doctrine, even in the mouth of a Pole ; and our worthy deputy, with an anxious precaution, highly flattering to our domestic authorities, steps forward, to protect them from that loss of respect which, he conceives, must be the inevitable consequence of its adoption in this country. And is it then, in Old England, that we are officially forbidden to utter a sentiment of indignation against "*pride, and lust, and rapine !*"—that we are no longer to be permitted, even dramatically, to imagine an abuse of power, or comment upon it !—Our tragedies, henceforward, are to be all "*couleur de rose*," in the eye of authority: our agents of "*pity and terror*" must lower their tone, and meddle not with more dignified offences, than those of the "*Hue and Cry*," or the "*Newgate Calendar*." We may, perhaps, take a hero from the hulks, or the Old Bailey, and sustain the decorum of our stage, by the graceful introduction of petty-larceny rogues, and man-milliner immoralities. How long shall we be allowed to point a shaft at a debauchee, or throw any dramatic discredit on the revels of the bacchanal, or the orgies of the gaming table ?

Is this the land

"Where tyrants have been taught to reverence man," the land, on touching whose shore, (in the eloquent words of Curran) "The slave swells beyond the measure of his chains, that burst from around him, and he stands redeemed, regenerated, and disinthralled!!!"

HOHENDAHL (*going to the side-scene.*)

My servants, there !

Audacious railer ! thou provokest my wrath
Beyond forbearance.

[*Two of the Baron's servants enter.*]

Seize the Count Alasco—

I here proclaim him rebel to the State.

ALASCO (*Drawing, and putting himself on his defence.*)
Slaves ! at your peril, venture on my sword !

WALSINGHAM.

My Lord ! my Lord ! this is my house—my castle ;
You do not—cannot—mean this violation :
Beneath the sanctuary of a soldier's roof,
His direst foe is safe.

HOHENDAHL.

But not his sovereign's ;
You would not screen a traitor from the law ?

WALSINGHAM.

Nor yield a victim, Sir, to angry power :
He came in confidence, and shall depart
In safety.—Here, my honor guards him.

HOHENDAHL.

Ha !

Your loyalty, my friend, seems rather nice,
And stands upon punctilio.

WALSINGHAM.

Yes, the loyalty

That is not nice, in honor and good faith,
May serve the tool—the slave—the sycophant—
But does not suit the soldier.

HOHENDAHL.

Colonel Walsingham,
My station must prescribe my duty here :—
[*To the attendants.*

Bear hence your prisoner, and await my orders.

WALSINGHAM (*Drawing and interposing.*)

Ha ! touch him, ruffians, on your lives ! By Heaven !
This arm has not yet lost its vigour.—Hence—
Hence, miscreants, from my presence, lest my rage
Forget that you're unworthy of my sword.

[*The Baron motions his attendants to retire.*

My Lord, this is an outrage on my honor—

[*Enter AMANTHA, from the opposite door.*

AMANTHA.

Have I not heard my father's voice in anger ?
O ! Heaven ! what horrid contest has been here ?
Alasco ! O ! Alasco, sure thou wouldst not—

ALASCO.

No, not for worlds, Amantha ; calm thy fears :
E'en with my life would I defend thy father.

WALSINGHAM (*separating ALASCO and AMANTHA—
solemnly.*)

Alasco, like a father I have loved thee,
And hoped a worn-out soldier might have found

Fit refuge in the winter of his age,
Beneath thy sheltering virtues; but no more :—
I have now beheld thee attainted of a crime,
Which blots thy fame and honor in my sight,
Beyond the blackest hue of felon trespass.
You've heard the charge, and as you may, must answer it.
As for my daughter here, 'tis fit you know,
Some fond delusions, born in happier hours,
Have passed away—you'll think of her no more.

ALASCO.

Had conscious wrong drawn down upon my head,
This solemn censure from a friend like thee,
It had been death to hear it : But, thank Heaven !
My soul in honor, as in duty clear,
Indignant triumphs o'er unjust reproach,
And holds her seat unshaken. For this Lord—
This minion of usurped authority,
“ Who, shrinking from the vengeance he provokes,
“ Would shelter him beneath the cloak of power,”
He knows I hold him less in fear than scorn,
And when, and where he dares, will answer him.

WALSINGHAM.

Till then, 'twere well you bear in mind, though Wal-
singham
Would jealous guard the privilege of his roof,
He harbours not disloyalty or treason.

ALASCO.

I understand, and will not tax too far
Your hospitality ; but thus repulsed,
Expelled your heart, and e'en your house denied me,
I've yet an interest here, (*turning to AMANTHA*) which I
would guard,
E'en as this world's best hope.

AMANTHA.

Support me, Heaven !

WALSINGHAM.

Urge me no more, young man, upon this theme :—
A father's privilege has for ever barred
Your claims upon Amantha.

ALASCO.

Sir, your pardon.—

My claims a parent's privilege cannot bar ;
They boast the sanction of a higher power,
And supersede the father—in the husband !

WALSINGHAM.

Husband !

HOHENDAHL.

Death to my hopes !—am I thus baffled !

ALASCO.

By all the rights that sacred bonds bestow,
Here, as my wedded wife, I claim Amantha.
How this should be, yet leave without a stain
Your daughter's duty, and Alasco's honor,
She will explain, and Friar Jerome testify

Till then, I will not trespass on your presence,
But in just confidence, await your pleasure.

[*Exit* ALASCO.]

WALSINGHAM (*to* AMANTHA.)

Hast thou belied the beauty of thy life,
And dared to disobey me ?

AMANTHA.

O no—never !

Never, as Heaven is witness, has this heart
Once fail'd in love or duty to my father.

WALSINGHAM.

Ha ! beware ! I cannot doubt Alasco.
Thou art his wife !—by Heaven, thou art his wife !—
Deny it not—thy burning cheek betrays thee.

AMANTHA.

Hear me, my father !

WALSINGHAM.

Away ! thou hast deceived me !
Thy angel mother's image in thy face,
Has lost its charm, and pleads for thee in vain.

AMANTHA.

Oh ! to that much-loved mother's hallowed shade,
I here appeal, to vindicate her child.
It was her living wish—her dying will—
On her death-bed, she join'd our trembling hands—
With her last breath, bestow'd the nuptial blessing.

WALSINGHAM.

Beyond forgiveness blacken not thy fault.

Thy mother !

She was my soul's sweet refuge from a world
Where I have been hardly used.

AMANTHA.

Then hear, my father !

O ! as you prized her virtues—loved her name,—
With patience hear, and judge her blameless child.—
Thou wert far distant—death approach'd so near,
We look'd, aghast and breathless, for the blow.
In that sad hour, when only in her fears,
The mother lived—when anxious for her child,
And trembling for her safety and her faith,
She, in Alasco's tried attachment sought
A shield for both, that she might die in peace.
The cherish'd purpose of thy heart towards him,
She long had known, and scrupled not, what seemed
Anticipation merely of thy will.

WALSINGHAM.

Most true. That thought I nourish'd in my breast,
And like a serpent, now it stings me there.
You may retire, Amantha.—Let the Friar
Be summon'd instantly—I must speak with him.

[*Exit* AMANTHA.]

My Lord, this unforeseen event defeats
Our purpose.

HOHENDAHL.

If it be true. But you will pardon me,

If I suspect this tale a stratagem,
Play'd off by crafty Jerome's enginery,
To bind the fair Amantha to his faith,
And aid Alasco's views.

WALSINGHAM.

I cannot think it.

With all a soldier's prejudice to priests,
I own myself subdued by Jerome's virtues.

HOHENDAHL.

It were a wise precaution, to remove
Your daughter to the castle. There secure,
(As this young man, by force or fraud, I fear,
May seek to gain possession of her person)
You may at leisure meditate, how best
To meet this exigence.

WALSINGHAM.

I apprehend
No danger from Alasco. " Though fallen off,
" I fear, from loyalty, yet in his heart
" The seeds of honor are too deeply sown,
" For sudden extirpation. Vice must wear
" Some specious mask of virtue, to seduce him."
But we must sift this matter. Walsingham
Will never calmly see the blood he boasts,
Thus mingled with a traitor's. [Exeunt.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

ACT II. —SCENE I.

The retired part of a Forest, at the close of Evening.

Enter ALASCO and CONRAD.

ALASCO.

No ! to be cold in such a cause as this,
Were cowardice, my friend, and not discretion.
“ But what has roused them from their lethargy ?
“ Dismayed and prostrate at the foot of power,
“ Their hearts seem’d dead within them.

CONRAD.

Stunn’d a while,

“ I grant you, by the blow ; but our state quacks
“ Have plied them with a course of stimulants,
“ And so they throb again ; their discipline
“ Has lashed us into life, and now our swords
“ Give sign of animation.”

ALASCO.

Armed, you say ?

And eager for the field ?

CONRAD.

Charged like a mine,
And ready to explode. There’s not a man of them

But holds the faith, that Poland's rights depend
Upon his sword.

ALASCO.

Your sanguine spirit, Conrad,
Always outruns the promise of events—
Provoking fortune. “ But why have you so long
“ Conceal'd their movements from me ?

CONRAD.

“ To redeem

My credit for discretion.

ALASCO.

“ That's a pledge
“ For which there's no redemption.

CONRAD.

“ Nay, not so.

“ I know you think me rash—impetuous—
“ Prompt to set sail with any wind that blows—
“ Unballasted, and without chart or compass.
“ But here I've used some caution, and observed
“ A more deliberate policy, to prove
“ The ship sea-worthy, ere my friend embark'd.

ALASCO.

“ Discretion, Conrad, sits not easy on you :
“ It is too cold a virtue for your use.
“ I trust, however, your ardour has not sought
“ In spirits sluggish and insensible,
“ To stir revolt, to unavailing ruin.”

CONRAD.

No. Their own wrongs have raised a flame that needs
No spark from me.

ALASCO.

They have a cause indeed,
Might warm the coward's blood to enterprize,
And wake the apathy of willing slaves;
"But if they feel it not—if sunk—subdued,
"The general spirit droops, and must be spurr'd
"And goaded on to action, 'tis in vain—
"The rash attempt recoils on their own heads,
"And crushes all their hopes."

CONRAD.

Lives there a Pole
That should not blush to wear an idle sword!
They feel it, and their hands are on their hilts—
Give but the word—they flash upon the foe.
The chieftains, with Malinski at their head,
Demand their country's freedom, and invoke
Alasco's aid.

ALASCO.

I like not that Malinski.
He's a mere brawler, Conrad—one who loves
To ring his peal loud in the public ear.
A fellow restless—crafty—full of wiles:
Beneath whose slimy surface you may trace
An under current gliding—deep and dangerous.

“ His life, too, sullied by debauch, too long
“ Has revell’d it with profligates, who scoff
“ At all restraint, and let the passions loose,
“ In riotous excess. ’Mongst such, indeed,
“ The fawning slave and factious demagogue
“ Are often found ; but seek not there, my friend,
“ For patriot worth, nor credit private vice
“ For public virtue.

CONRAD.

“ O ! you’re hard upon him :
“ He has been wild indeed, and thoughtless ; yet,
“ We soldiers may excuse him.

ALASCO.

Conrad, no !

“ The soldier’s licence must not stretch so far.
“ In the loose camp, and reckless hour of war,
“ He cannot always move by moral rule.
“ But we’ve no privilege to compound with crime,
“ Or comrade with dishonor.

CONRAD.

“ I confess

“ He’s vain, and for a brave man, rather boisterous ;
“ But yet, you’ll find him fired with noble zeal,
“ And hearty in the cause.”

ALASCO.

Beware of him.

The factious violence of thwarted pride,
And the low spleen that vulgar natures cherish,
Against the pomps and dignities of the world,
Too oft assume the mask of patriot zeal,
And cheat us, in the garb of public virtue.

CONRAD.

My life upon their honesty and spirit !
This is no flash of thoughtless turbulence—
No sudden burst of feverish discontent,
That in a frantic struggle raves and dies,
But a matured and well-weigh'd enterprize,
Where all is risk'd by those who all have suffer'd,
And each man feels, 'tis victory or death !

ALASCO.

Well, then, there's hope for Poland. As for me,
I hold my sword, my station, and my life,
But as a trust, devoted to my country ;
And when she calls, I'm ready.

CONRAD.

They depend
Upon your aid and guidance.

ALASCO.

I will not fail them, Conrad.
Since their own hearts have kindled in this cause,
They'll stand to it like men, and do their duty.
There lies our strength. *But must we shake his chains,*

*And make them rattle in his recreant ears,
The slave is roused in vain.**

*[A noise of fighting at a distance.
A voice behind the scenes.*

Assassins ! murderers !

ALASCO.

This way, Conrad ! this way the cry approaches.

(Alasco and Conrad draw their swords and run out.

Col. Walsingham enters at the back scene fighting with two ruffians, masked, who nearly overpower him. Alasco and Conrad re-enter to his assistance. Alasco kills one of the assassins, and the other takes to flight.

WALSINGHAM.

Sir, you have nobly rescued me, and saved
A worn out soldier.

ALASCO.

Heavens ! Colonel Walsingham !

* The reader, I should think, will be at a loss to conceive, what there is morally, or politically wrong in this sentiment, to call forth official indignation :—it points out the folly, if not the wickedness, of stirring up to unavailing effort, those who are not alive to the degradation of slavery, or prepared for the blessings of freedom : it would leave the fruit of liberty to ripen by the natural process, and not force it by stimulants, to an unsound and deceitful maturity.

WALSINGHAM.

Alasco !

ALASCO.

Alone, and in this trackless wood,
Assailed by ruffians—you are wounded, Sir.

WALSINGHAM.

A scratch, skin-deep—the wretch who gave it, would
Have seized my sword—I foiled him, and his life
Has answered it.

ALASCO.

What strange occurrence can
Have led to this ?

WALSINGHAM.

I have scarcely breath to tell you.
Proceeding to the castle, as we reached
The outskirts of the forest, a loud cry
Of one in desperate peril, called for help ;
We, on the instant, plunged into the wood,
And by the sound conducted, followed far,
Still baffled, and the object of our search
Receding from us ; till at length, perplexed,
And doubtful of our course, we stood at fault ;
When sudden, from the ambush where they lay,
Three ruffians, masked and muffled, rushed upon us :
Dismayed, my dastardly attendant fled,
And left me to the fate, which your good swords
So timely have prevented.

ALASCO.

O ! most fortunate !

Thank heaven ! Amantha shared not your alarm.

WALSINGHAM.

She, with her escort had passed on before,
Ere this, I trust, she's safe within the castle.

ALASCO.

Amantha at the castle, did you say ?
Amantha safe beneath the roof of Hohendahl !
With wolves and tygers—fiends and devils safe—
But not with Hohendahl—the thought is frenzy !
By Heaven you have compelled her to this course ;
Not e'en a father's prayers should have prevailed
To such perdition. No !—

WALSINGHAM.

Alasco, hear me !

For all that life is worth to age, and care,
I am your debtor, and would spare reproaches.
But, if I've sought the safety of my child,
Beneath the Baron's roof, you are yourself
The cause. Peruse this paper. [*Gives him a letter.*]

ALASCO (*reading.*)

“ If you regard the safety of your daughter,
“ Remove her from your house without delay ;
“ The Count Alasco has devised a plan,
“ To seize this night, possession of her person ;
“ He has a force prepared to effect his purpose,

“ You may elude, but will in vain resist him.
“ In giving you this warning, I conceive
“ I act the friend to both, and without scruple
“ Therefore, sign it—Conrad.”

CONRAD.

Conrad !

ALASCO.

Confusion !

By Heaven there's treachery here of blackest dye !
My soul is all alarm—the monster Hohendahl
Has hatched some horrid mischief 'gainst Amantha,
And this device has placed her in his power.

CONRAD.

Must I disclaim this baseness, and protest—

ALASCO.

Your hand, my friend ! you are above suspicion.
But let us view this miscreant's face more nearly.

(They examine the assassin.)

CONRAD.

I have seen these features,—'tis the ruffian brow
Of Rudolph—better named, the Baron's blood-hound.

ALASCO.

As I suspected ! a most foul intent,
Combining fraud, and blood, and violation.
Unhappy father ! you have placed your child,
E'en in the tyger's grasp—but let me rush
To my Amantha's rescue—on moments now,

Hang horrors that may blast my hopes for ever.
Conduct the Colonel safely through the forest,
Then follow to the castle, with what force
Your zeal may muster, to assist me there.
I fly to save, or perish to avenge her.

(*Exit* ALASCO.)

WALSINGHAM.

A sudden light has opened on my soul,
In gleams of horror—Hohendahl's a villain :
A thousand damning proofs now flash around me !
He first suggested danger to Amantha,
And urged me to remove her ; nay the wretch
Who fled, and left me to the assassin's daggers,
He sent me as an escort. Powers of mercy !
Have I betrayed my daughter to a ruffian !

CONRAD.

'Twere prudent, Sir, to seek the nearest succour,
Your wound still bleeds.

WALSINGHAM.

The body's hurt is slight,
And soon repaired—but I have a deeper wound ;
That's planted here—a wound that bleeds to death—
Struck to the very vitals of my peace ;
Yet shall the traitor find, that some warm drops
Are left in this old heart ; and they shall flow—
Flow till the very fount of life is dry,
Or else I will have vengeance for this wrong. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

An antiquated Apartment in the Castle.

Enter AMANTHA and BERTHA.

AMANTHA.

Not yet arrived ! good Heaven protect my father !
I fear some sad mischance—

BERTHA.

My dear young lady,
Do not thus lightly yield to causeless terrors,
Some unforeseen occurrence has delayed him.

AMANTHA.

Bertha, a thousand horrid thoughts arise
That threaten to distract me. Why am I here ?
Beneath this hated roof—the roof of Hohendahl ?
At such a moment, suddenly removed,
So unprepared, and even unapprized,
Or why, or whither : then, that letter too ;
Which seemed so strangely to disturb my father !
Whence came that letter, Bertha ?

BERTHA.

One, whose garb
Of forester seemed rather a disguise,

Desired its quick delivery to your father,
Then hastily retired.

AMANTHA.

There is in this,
A mystery that confounds me. Heavenly powers !
What must Alasco think ?—how will he rave,
To find me thus delivered as it were,
To his worst enemy ;—but no—it cannot be,—
My father never would betray his child.
Hark ! hark ! did I not hear the tramp of horsemen !
Fly Bertha, to the gate—in pity fly,
And bless me with some tidings of my father.

[*Exit* BERTHA.]

A terror sure, beyond th' occasion thrills
Through all my frame. I feel as one imprisoned—
As hope and safety were shut out these walls.
How still again !—no stir of life relieves
The dreary sense of loneliness that sinks me !
Would Bertha were come back ! silence sleeps here,
As 'twere the death of sound, appalling more
Than uproar. Hark !—'twas my own motion startled
me.

“ There is a gloom in grandeur which, methinks,
“ O'erclouds the cheerful spirit—frolic mirth,
“ The homely happiness of humbler life,
“ Retreats abashed before the solemn brow,

“ Of courtly pomp and grave-air’d ceremony.
In these apartments, since her death, disused,
The Baron’s lady—hapless Elrica,
From some mysterious cause, was long immured.
A woman of all excellence, ’tis said,
And as the story goes, most foully dealt by.
Here hangs her picture, and it speaks her fair ;
“ A sweetness sad, submissive and resigned,
“ Beaming serenely forth, thro’ grace and symmetry.”
How my heart sinks in horror of the wretch,
Whose cruelty betrayed her !

Enter HOHENDAHL.

Heavens ! he’s here !

HOHENDAHL.

The fair Amantha honors much my roof ;
Her presence in this heart makes holiday,
And thus I pay my thanks.

(Stooping to kiss her hand.

AMANTHA *(withdrawing it.)*

Your thanks, my Lord,
If thanks indeed, be due, are misapplied ;
My father may receive, but I disclaim them.
I am here but in obedience to his will,
Against my own.

HOHENDAHL.

Unkindly said ! in what,
Has my presumption called for this reproof ?

To find Amantha here, a willing guest,
Were sure the last delusion, dying hope
Could frame for Hohendahl.

AMANTHA.

I pray you, pardon me ;—
My thoughts are ill attuned to compliment.
Some fears disturb me for my father's safety ;
You can, perhaps, remove them, and account
For his delay.

HOHENDAHL.

I look'd to have found him here ;
“ But though the time grows wanton, and of late,
“ To outrage prone, I entertain no thought
“ Of danger to my friend.” The precious charge,
Confided to my care, he knows is safe,
And at his leisure, follows, to reclaim it.
Why will Amantha thus with scorn repel,
The homage of a heart, which, at her shrine,
Forgets all other worship ?

AMANTHA.

Sir, this theme
Was never grateful to me—you are aware
Of that which now would make it culpable,
For you to urge it more, or me to listen to it.

HOHENDAHL.

By Heavens ! I know not what should bar my way,
To fair Amantha's favour, nor whose claim,

Shall thus unquestioned cross me. Baron Hohendahl,
Yields no precedence, lady, in a cause,
Where love, or honor is the prize; and he
Might hope a patient hearing to his suit,
E'en though unprivileged by a father's sanction.

AMANTHA.

My father, Sir, can never sanction crime,
And would not suffer insult.

HOHENDAHL.

Insult !

AMANTHA.

Yes,

Insult, my Lord ! what 'twere a crime to grant,
'Tis insult to solicit—a lover's vows
Profane the wedded ear; and from her soul,
The wife of Count Alasco scorns a suit,
Which, but to hear, must taint her plighted honor.

HOHENDAHL.

The wife of Count Alasco ! ha ! beware !
Nor rashly tempt too far an outraged spirit.
As you would shun perdition and despair,
Plead not to me that title.

AMANTHA.

Not to thee !—

It is my pride—my boast—my sole possession !
'Tis my best hope of happiness in life,
And death alone can now deprive me of it.

HOHENDAHL.

Do you not fear to rouse a tempest here?—
To wake wild passion in a breast like mine?
Where love is lashed to madness by disdain,
And jealousy and vengeance rage by turns?
By Heaven! could I believe the crafty tale,
Devised to work upon a father's weakness,
'Twould but the more inflame my burning blood,
And give to love the relish of revenge.

AMANTHA.

What you call love, I well believe, may prompt
A bad man's passions to a wicked purpose;
“Nor can I doubt, the privilege of your roof
“ (That hallowed claim, which to a sanctuary turns
“ The savage hut, even for a deadly foe)
“ Were urged in vain, to such a heart as yours,”
Yet think not *I* can fear your love or hate;
My father's honor guards me, and I feel,
Even here, secure beneath the shield of Walsingham.

HOHENDAHL.

Your father, madam, or I much mistake,
Would use that shield against another foe:
A different danger pressed him, when he found
His only daughter plotting 'gainst his peace,
And sought the refuge of my roof, to guard
Her person, and her honor from a traitor.

AMANTHA.

A traitor!

HOHENDAHL.

Yes,—a most notorious traitor !
Who holds his life on sufferance of the law,
Till mellowed in rebellion, he becomes
Avowed in villainy, and ripe for vengeance.

AMANTHA.

Good angels guard the life of my Alasco !
But shall I credit this unmanly railer !
No, 'tis slander—'tis slander, on my life !
The wanton malice of a coward's tongue,
To terrify a woman.

HOHENDAHL.

Ha ! your zeal
Is ardent, madam, and defies all hazards :
Perhaps, a calmer bearing were discretion.
I may resent these insults—yes, by Heaven !
What hinders now, but on those scornful lips,
That pout their high displeasure thus against me,
I print the vengeance due to love disdained,
And triumph o'er your minion !

AMANTHA.

Heaven defend me !
A dreadful thought—a dart of fire has pierced me !
Where is my father ?—tell me where's my father ?
This wanton outrage wakes me to a fear,
My nature shrinks at. Oh ! you have not murdered
him ?

But say he's safe—say you've not shed his blood !
And I will on my knees, for blessings on you.
But did you think he breathed upon this earth,
You had not dared this insult to his child.

HOHENDAHL.

Living or dead, a thousand fathers now
Should not prevail, to turn me from my prey ;
No !—you have trampled on a heart that yet,
Was never safely scorned—you are in the toils,
And by hell's powers ! a miracle alone,
Can now redeem you from them.

AMANTHA.

Angels guard me !

HOHENDAHL.

I meant a gentler prelude to my purpose ;
But your proud taunts have fallen upon my soul,
Like fiery drops, and blistered me to frenzy.

AMANTHA.

Monster ! what mean your horrid threats and gestures ?
You would not kill me ?

HOHENDAHL.

No ! at least not yet—
Till I have closed the account of love and vengeance,—
Have paid myself with interest for my wrongs,
And triumphed in thy arms.

AMANTHA.

Lost—lost for ever !

HOHENDAHL.

“ Perhaps, when you grow tarnished in my sight,
“ And other beauties tempt me, I may then,
“ From this bad world in pity set you free,
“ Or cast you with disdain, to your Alasco.

AMANTHA.

“ Merciless villain !—betrayed to shame and ruin ! ”

HOHENDAHL.

Come, let me stop this railing, and instruct
Those lips in gentler duties.

AMANTHA.

Ruffian, unhand me !
My cries shall raise the castle, and proclaim
To heaven, this perfidy.

*A voice seeming to proceed from an Alcove in the
back scene.*

“ Forbear, forbear ! ”

HOHENDAHL (*Starting.*)

Am I betrayed ! or, was that dreadful voice,
A warning from the grave !—

Voice again.

Forbear !

HOHENDAHL.

Again !

By heaven ! the sound unbraces every nerve,
And chills the heart within me—who goes there ?

[*Looking eagerly round, till he fixes on the picture of his wife.*]

Can walls and things inanimate find tongues,
To startle our intents!—What! do I shake
In superstition's palsy, like a slave!
A fanatic, that's scared at his own shadow!
No!—if the devil and all his imps stood guard,
I'll rush upon my prey.

AMANTHA.

Help, help! Oh, help!

Friar Jerome enters suddenly from a private door of the Alcove in the back scene, and at the same instant, Alasco bursts in violently at the side door, with his sword drawn.

HOHENDAHL,

Hell and vengeance!—thus to be braved and baffled!—

ALASCO (*runs to Amantha.*)

Fear not, my Amantha! your Alasco's here.

HOHENDAHL.

What! you would beard the lion in his den!—

Even within my castle's walls assault me!

Die, fool! in thy presumption.

[*Draws a pistol from his breast, and fires at Alasco.*]

AMANTHA.

Oh! my Alasco!

[*Sinks fainting into a chair, supported by Jerome.*]

ALASCO.

Wretch ! I am reserved, to punish guilt like thine.
Draw and defend yourself.

[They fight, and the Baron is disarmed.]

Take up your sword ;

“ I scorn to press on a defenceless foe.

HOHENDAHL.

“ Strike ! ’tis the mercy you had found from me ;

“ Disarmed, I dare still grapple with a traitor.

ALASCO.

Villain, defend yourself !

HOHENDAHL. *(taking up his sword.)*

To your heart, then.

[They fight,—the Baron’s servants, alarmed by the sound of the pistol, rush in, seize and disarm Alasco.]

AMANTHA *(reviving.)*

Where am I !—Alasco !—Heavens ! do I revive,
To see you thus ! save him—Oh save my husband

[Runs to Alasco, who catches her in his arms.]

HOHENDAHL.

Tear them asunder, tho’ you rend their joints,
And to the lowest dungeon, drag that traitor.

ALASCO.

Off ! off, ye ruffians !

[Breaks from them, and rushes to Amantha, but is again overpowered.]

HOHENDAHL.

Slaves, drag him hence !

And rid my presence of that reverend spy,
Who lurks in holes and secret passages,
To steal upon my privacy, and betray me.

JEROME.

Rash man ! restrain thy rage—thou knowest, I dare
Defy the frothy menace of thy power,
And will fulfil my duty.—

HOHENDAHL.

Duty, priest !

JEROME.

Proud Baron, yes !—to save a *second* victim.—
“ Priests are the guards of innocence and virtue,
“ And in that office, still, the church protects
“ Her ministers. Nay, chafe not idly thus ;
“ I have a privilege here, thou darest not question :—
“ Beneath this roof, till thy base usurpation,
“ The seat and shrine of my long honoured race,
“ Not one of those who tremble at thy frown,
“ Would at thy bidding harm this hoary head.

HOHENDAHL.

Audacious meddler ! [*Noise of tumult without*

Ha ! what means this uproar ?

Enter a Servant hastily.

Slave, what portends the ague of thy face ?
Speak, or I will strike you to the earth !

SERVANT.

My Lord,

The guard has been surprised. The outer gate,
Forced by the furious onset of a crowd,
Who cry, to fire the castle, and demand
The Count Alasco.

HOHENDAHL.

Ha ! Treason so near !

Summon my servants—guard the postern gate,
And, on your lives ! let none pass out, or enter !
When we have dash'd these miscreants from our walls,
We'll deal with Count Alasco—follow me.

[Draws his sword, and exit with his servants.]

AMANTHA.

Oh, Heavens ! Alasco, what a fate is ours !
My father too !

ALASCO.

Is safe, my best Amantha.

Calm all your fears ; there's succour in those shouts ;
They speak the approach of friends, and promise rescue.
Good Jerome, to your safeguard for awhile—
This arm, though weaponless, may be of use.

[Exit ALASCO.]

AMANTHA.

Alasco ! Oh ! Alasco ! do not leave me.

* *Oh ! God !* he has rush'd unarm'd amidst his foes !

* Far be it from the author of *Alasco*, to introduce with levity or irreverence, the solemn exclamation here objected to.—He conceives,

JEROME.

Courage, my child ! his virtues are his shield :
 Heaven will not let th' unjust prevail against him.
 But let us seize the means that Providence
 Now offers for thy safety—through this door,
 A passage lies, unthought of and unguarded.

however, that the principle upon which the use of it is censured, to be consistent, should be carried much farther, and directed to reprobate and put down all those impressive appeals to heaven and its sacred host, which have been hitherto allowed, to assist the impassioned effect and moral dignity of the tragic muse. The piety of our present licenser, however, will reform all this, and I have only to say in my defence, that if I have sinned, I have sinned in good company.

HAMLET, ACT 1. SCENE 2.

“ God ! O God !

“ How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable

“ Seem to me all the uses of this world ! ”

PIZARRO, ACT 1. SCENE 1.

“ *Elvira.* O ! God ! what have I not sacrificed for him.”

PIZARRO, ACT 4. SCENE 1.

“ *Alonzo.* O ! God !

PIZARRO, ACT 4. SCENE 1.

“ *Rolla.* Forgive me, God of truth, if I am wrong.”

OROONOKO, ACT 2. SCENE 1.

“ Thou God adored ! ”

To which might be added about a thousand other examples from our best tragedies, ancient and modern ; but these above quoted may perhaps satisfy the reader, that the author of *Alasco* has indulged in no unprecedented exclamatory impiety. He is aware, however, that the reforming rage of our new dramatic moralist is not to be appeased by the citation of such profane authorities.

Trust boldly to my care, and follow me.

“ I have a friend within the castle’s walls,

“ Will aid us for concealment or escape.”

Nay, shrink not thus—I’ll answer for thy safety.

AMANTHA.

What ! fly, uncertain of Alasco’s fate ?

Leave him, perhaps to torture and to death !

Oh ! never—never.—I am his wife, good father,

And will not now desert him.

JEROME.

Hark ! my child !

The tumult draws this way—a moment more,

’Twill be too late. E’en for Alasco’s sake,

Consult thy safety.

AMANTHA.

Urge me not in vain ;

Nor think I slight thy zeal ; but I’m resolved,

And will abide the storm.

[*The tumult approaches.*

JEROME.

Alas ! they’re here !

*Enter ALASCO, CONRAD, and a party of armed
Peasants, with the Baron HOHENDAHL and
his servants, disarmed, and prisoners.*

ALASCO (*running to AMANTHA.*)

Heaven, my Amantha, still extends its shield

O’er innocence and virtue. Thou art safe,

Thanks to the timely succour of my friend,
And these, our brave deliverers.

AMANTHA.

Oh ! my Alasco,
Let us fly this roof :—lead, lead me to my father.

CONRAD *half aside to* ALASCO.

Say, shall we fire the castle, and unhouse
This hedgehog ?

ALASCO.

Conrad, no !—as you regard
My honor and your own, no farther violence !
For this bad man, the burning rage and shame
Of baffled guilt confound him ; and we need
No heavier vengeance, than the hell within him.
Release him, friends, and give him back the sword,
His prowess, in a nobler cause, had graced.
But boldness, seconding an evil purpose,
Shews like a ruffian's daring, and at best,
Is but the coward's courage—desperation.

[They return the Baron his sword, which appears broken.]

HOHENDAHL.

Curse on the treacherous steel that fail'd this arm !
Else had not traitors triumph'd.

ALASCO.

When next we meet,
A double retribution waits thee. *Now,*

Our private injuries yield to public wrong,

* *The avenging sword ;—we strike but for our country !*

*[Exeunt ALASCO, AMANTHA, and party, at
one door, the Baron and servants at the other.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

• As this passage has been expunged with more than the ordinary rage of red ink, it is to be supposed, that private vengeance is, in the estimation of our judicious censor, a nobler motive for drawing the sword, than public wrong, and that when we strike, it should be for ourselves, and not for our country !!!

ACT III.—SCENE I.

The Hall of a Monastery.

Enter WALSINGHAM, ALASCO, and AMANTHA.

WALSINGHAM.

Name him no more, Alasco :—" he's a villain !

" A base, ignoble upstart, who has forged

" The stamp of sterling honor and high birth,

" To set it on a ruffian. By my soul !"

Ere this, my sword had satisfied my wrongs,

But faint with loss of blood, e'en from this scratch,

My worn-out limbs turn'd traitors to my rage,

And left me helpless—But he shall answer me !

AMANTHA.

O ! my dear father ! use some caution with him ;

You know, his wealth and office give him sway,

That makes him dangerous.

WALSINGHAM.

Dangerous, Amantha ?

Grant me patience ! What ! have I held my life

On war's frail tenure, still, and undismay'd,

In every face of danger look'd on death—

Now to be scared by this mock majesty !
 Am I so lightly held—so low in estimate,
 * *To brook dishonor from a knave in place,*
 And crouch me, like a pliant underling,
 As if a thunder-cloud discharged its wrath,
 In his official frown ! By Heaven, not so !
 The slave shall answer me. I will avenge
 This outrage on my child.

ALASCO.

Nay, Sir, that task

* *To brook dishonor from a knave in place.*

The reader will doubtless, consider the suppression of this disloyal verse, as a peculiarly happy illustration of the spirit in which the licenser has wielded his expurgatory pen through the pages of "Alasco." This vigorous functionary has taken all knaves in place under his especial patronage, wherever they are found, abroad or at home, in *posse* or in *esse*:—with the tender solicitude of office, he graciously extends to them his protection against the saucy sarcasms of unplaced, unpensioned, and unprivileged bards. It is to be regretted, indeed, that this sapient personage did not live and reign in the audacious days of the Beggar's Opera. With what a virtuous indignation he would have dashed his official quill through the following licentious assault on all that is moral, wise, good, and gracious in his estimation:—

"Should you censure the age,
 Be cautious and sage,
 Lest the courtiers offended should be ;
 If you mention vice or bribe,
 'Tis so pat to all the tribe,
 Each cries, 'That was levell'd at me!'"

Beggars Opera, Act II. Scene 2

Is mine. You know, I claim a husband's right,
To be Amantha's champion.

WALSINGHAM.

Cease, Alasco !

The soldier's honor, he himself must guard ;
That service knows no substitute—the slave !
“ 'Tis thus the downy pillow'd head of power
“ Sleeps on secure, unconscious of the wrong,
“ The ministering hands have dared to perpetrate.”

But come, no more of this.

You have saved the father's life—the daughter's honor—
She must pay for both. *[Joining their hands.]*

AMANTHA.

My dear, dear father !

ALASCO.

O ! rich reward, beyond Alasco's worth !
So help me, Heaven ! as I shall proudly hang
This jewel at my heart, and wear it there,
Till life's last pulse shall cease, and nature fail me.

WALSINGHAM.

Well, well ! I am glad you value her so highly.
To-morrow, in his chapel here, good Jerome,
To mine, shall add Heaven's blessing.

ALASCO.

That high sanction—

WALSINGHAM.

You have received already, you would say.

I know it all—the Friar has confirmed it;
 But, for my satisfaction—she is my child—
 'Tis but a day's delay, and I myself
 Would give her, at the altar, to my friend.

ALASCO.

Your pleasure, Sir, must ever be our law.

WALSINGHAM.

Your angel mother's spirit, then, my child !
 Will smile on her old soldier ; her heart's wish
 Will then have been fulfill'd. In creed we differ'd—
 It was our only difference, and her zeal
 Dreaded a father's influence with Amantha.
 But I was never skill'd in controversy ;
 Fear God, and love the king—the soldier's faith !
 Was always my religion, and I know
 No heretics, but cowards, knaves, and traitors.
 “ When I have seen, in the hot hour of war,
 “ A gallant fellow mount the perilous breach,
 “ And lay about him bravely, for his country ;
 “ I never question'd him his faith—not I !
 “ But, by his practice, judged him a good Christian.”
No, no, what'er the colour of his creed,
 * *The man of honor's orthodox.* But now, [*to AMANTHA.*

* This expression may possibly not be considered very immoral, irreligious, or uncharacteristic in the mouth of a brave and honorable soldier. To those, however, who are actively employed in endeavouring to rouse into a flame the dying embers of religious animosity

Retire, my child, a moment—I would speak
A word or two, in private, with Alasco.

[*Exit* AMANTHA.]

Alasco ! I have given you my child—
Placed in your hands, the treasure of my life—
Loosed the strong chain of nature round my heart,
And made you master of the only link
That binds me to this world.

ALASCO.

Sir, I confess

The gift beyond all price. “ To love Amantha,
“ From the first dawn of passion in my soul,
“ Has been the pleasure of existence to me.
“ Not fancy’s self e’er feign’d a form of joy,
“ But wore her semblance, and assumed her smile.

WALSINGHAM.

“ You long have been the son of my adoption ;
“ You’re now my son, as husband to my child.
“ I have thus a double interest in your fortunes,

and sectarian persecution, it must be particularly obnoxious ;—and we cannot be surprised that a pious public officer should eagerly suppress a sentiment so hostile to those principles of division, and dissension, which there would seem to be now such a disposition to revive. For the sentiment here expressed by Walsingham, the author disdains to make any other defence than in the words of Pope:

“ For forms of faith, let angry zealots fight,
“ His can’t be wrong, whose life is in the right.”

“ And claim a father’s privilege, to inquire

“ Of what concerns me near.

ALASCO.

“ Both filial love

“ And grateful reverence prompt my duty to

“ My father and my friend.”

WALSINGHAM.

What I have heard

To taint your name, from Hohendahl, I should hold,

But as the slander of a villain’s tongue,

To be no more regarded ; but I own,

Awaked suspicion strengthens his report,

And makes that look like truth, which first seem’d
calumny.—

Why throng these men around you thus, Alasco?

They wear a busy, bold, unquiet look,

That to a soldier’s eye speaks mutiny,

And puts authority upon the alert.

“ Importance frowns on each plebeian brow,

“ As if the weight of some great enterprize

“ Hung balanced in their hands.” What common bond
Unites you to such men?

ALASCO.

Their wrongs, my father—

Our common wrongs—**our country’s wrongs, unite us,*

* “ Our country’s wrongs unite us.”

This must be considered as a most alarming principle!—big with

These men are rough, 'tis true, but they are honest.
We are somewhat, Sir, indebted to their prowess.

WALSINGHAM.

I own the service render'd to Amantha,
And will requite it, when occasion serves ;
But, that they've been so prompt in such a service—
So prepared for it—betrays some dark design,
And desperate policy.

ALASCO.

Resentment, Sir,

Will ripen to resistance—long oppression
Will prompt the dullest actor in his part,
And make the slave a Brutus.

the ruin of empires, and subversive of that long established maxim of political morality—"divide et impera," which has been found so efficacious in all ages.

The worthy licenser has been, hitherto, only skirmishing, as it were, with the out-posts of political delinquency. He now, however, approaches the main body of offence ; lays about him lustily ; cuts right and left ; and with a vigour worthy of the Knight of La Mancha, assails every windmill in his course. The formidable dialogue which follows this passage, is reported to have produced a panic in the Chamberlain's office, quite unparalleled, since the misdeeds of Molière, in his *Tartuffe*, and Brooke, in his *Gustavus Vasa*, stirred up to a similar perturbation, the terrified authorities of other days. To one side of the colloquy, indeed, the official critic is supposed to have had no particular objection, and, like the sagacious animal reported in familiar history to have been somewhat perplexed between opposite attractions, he hesitated some time between his two bundles of hay ; till at length, his loyal nature took the alarm, and "turned the scale of fate."

WALSINGHAM.

Let me be calm !

But if you would not, I should think you all
 My fears suggest, use not, this jargon with me.
 Brutus !—the name's a watchword for all reprobates ;
 Th' assassin stabs with it on his tongue—the dark
 Conspirator invokes it in his prayers—
 The rebel mouths it when he means revolt,
 And quotes it as authority for treason.
 Alasco ! let me warn you, ere too late ;—
 “ Your zeal's romantic, wild, and dangerous ; ”
 When loyalty and honor are our guides,
 We make no vain parade of Roman virtue.

ALASCO.

*When Roman crimes prevail, methinks 'twere well,
 Should Roman virtue still be found to punish them.
 * May every Tarquin meet a Brutus still,
 And every tyrant feel one !*

* May every Tarquin, &c.

VENICE PRESERVED, ACT II.

“ Friends, was not Brutus,

(I mean that Brutus, who in open senate
 Stabbed the first Cæsar that usurped the world)
 A gallant man ?”

JULIUS CÆSAR, ACT I. SCENE II.

“ There was a Brutus once, who would have brooked
 Th' eternal devil to keep his state in Rome,
 As easily as a king.”

Amantha, Sir, had found Lucretia's fate,
 But for disloyal swords. Just powers of Heaven !
 To suffer tamely injuries like these,
 Were sure almost as base as to inflict them.

WALSINGHAM.

To suffer tamely, has not been my humour,
 Count Alasco !—I feel the Baron's perfidy,
 And will avenge it, as becomes a soldier.

CATO, ACT II. SCENE I.

" Gods ! can a Roman senate long debate
 Which of the two to choose, slavery or death ?

* * * * *

Perhaps some arm, more lucky than the rest,
 May reach his heart, and free the world from bondage.

AGAIN.

" O ! could my dying hand but lodge a sword
 In Cæsar's bosom, and revenge my country,
 By Heavens ! I could enjoy the pangs of death,
 And smile in agony."

Thus exclaimeth the bard of "Cato,"—uncensured,—unsuppressed. The pious, moral Addison !

" Who taught us how to live ; and O ! too high
 The price of knowledge ! taught us how to die !"

TICKELL.

" Mais nous avons changé tout cela ;"—according to the new code, the Muse of Tragedy must mend her manners, and speak with more respect of those dramatic bluebeards, tyrants and usurpers.

Of the younger Brutus, the author of *Alasco* has expressed his opinion in another place ; but in the character of a patriot, represented as suffering from the most atrocious abuse of power that ever disgraced the records of oppression, he did not consider himself at liberty to introduce his own sentiments.

But private injuries must be referred
To honor's high tribunal, or the laws;
Who seeks redress by violence and outrage,
Mars his own cause, commits a public wrong,
And makes himself the offender.

ALASCO.

Sir, what course,
What process or of honor, or of law,
Shall take usurped authority to task,
And bid him answer it? *Before what bar,
Shall hapless wretches cite the power that grinds
And crushes them to earth? O! no, no, no!
When tyrants trample on all rights and duties,
And law becomes the accomplice of oppression,
There is but one appeal—*

WALSINGHAM.

I understand you!
Your swords—your daggers, whetted for our throats!—
What! 'sdeath, you cannot mean!—you're not so lost—
So past all hope distempered—answer me—
In plain blunt speech, to suit a soldier's ear.
I want no fine harangue—no frothy declamation—
No strut and swell of patriot dignity!
One word will do, to stab me to the heart,
And tell me you're a traitor.

ALASCO.

Ha! a traitor!

The word is somewhat harsh, Sir,—but from you,
Not easily atoned for—as it is—

WALSINGHAM.

Young man, we know you are brave, and prompt in
quarrel ;

My blood perhaps, would not become your sword,
But when 'tis reeking from your country's vitals,
The patriot will not shrink from parricide.

ALASCO.

Your justice, in a calmer moment, Sir,
Had spared me that reproach.

WALSINGHAM.

By Heaven, 'tis madness !

What wrongs do you complain of?—what oppression?
Young, rich and noble—warm in fortune's lap—
With all her toys and rattles to amuse you—
What grievance touches you so near—so home—
'That you must needs turn patriot in your spleen,
And shame the blood of heroes in sedition?

ALASCO.

Ask you my grievance?—'tis my country's ruin—
*What! is 't because I live and breathe at large—
Can eat, drink, sleep, and move unmanacled,
That I should calmly view my country's wrongs!*
* *For what are we styled noble, and endowed*

* *For what are we styled noble, and endowed, &c.*

Although this passage may not square exactly with that "beau

*With pomp and privilege ! “stationed to look down,
“From lofty pedestals of state, on those,
“By whose hard toil we live in luxury ?”
For what, thus raised above our fellow creatures,
And fed like gods on incense, but to shew
Superior worth—pre-eminence of virtue !
To guard with holy zeal the people’s rights,
And stand firm bulwarks ’gainst the tide of power,
When rushing to o’erwhelm them.*

WALSINGHAM.

Blast to my hopes !

idéal” of patrician perfection, which our judicious deputy delights to contemplate, yet, must the author be allowed to doubt, if there can be found, in this great country, one individual, possessing the spirit, or deserving the name of a nobleman, who will declare, that he considers the qualities and duties here ascribed to that character, as inappropriate, or injurious to its just estimation.

“What can ennoble sots, or fools, or cowards?

Alas ! not all the blood of all the Howards !”

As far as the opinions and principles of Count Alasco are concerned, he will not, I should hope, be considered a discreditable representative of the privileged order to which he belongs ;—he will not I trust, be disclaimed by those who would sustain the “Corinthian capital of polished Society,” in un mouldering and un mutilated preservation ; by those who, inheriting the high spirit of independence which characterised the ancient Barons of England, remember, with pride, that their ancestors were the first to embody in chartered security, those principles of public right, which at this day, form the best basis for the stability of the throne, and the safety of the people.

And is rebellion then the benefit,
Your virtue would confer upon your country ?

ALASCO.

** 'Tis not rebellion to resist oppression ;
'Tis virtue to avenge our country's wrongs,
And self-defence to strike at an usurper.*

WALSINGHAM.

What blustering school-boy has supplied this theme,
This rant, this rhapsody of dull sedition !
This is the common cant of knaves and hypocrites,
To mask in sounding phrases, monstrous crimes,
Till fools, deluded, fancy they are virtues.

ALASCO.

This topic warms you, Sir—I would not fail
In reverence and respect, and therefore, must
Withdraw from your displeasure.

** 'Tis not rebellion, &c.*

The author would be ashamed, indeed, if, with Englishmen, he could enter into a serious vindication of principles which are bound up and interwoven with their earliest associations ;—principles to the adoption and operation of which, they are indebted for every blessing they enjoy. Great must be the degradation of our drama, when, to such a character as Count Alasco, a noble Pole, who has witnessed the desolation of his country, a tragic writer cannot give those sentiments which are suited to his station and his fate, without incurring the censure of authority ;—without being considered, as committing an outrage on the interests of a people, amongst whom, the principles here asserted, are still held in such reverence, that even those who would willingly slander and suppress, are yet afraid to disavow them.

WALSINGHAM.

Stay, rash boy !

I have a right to speak, and you must hear me.
Some privilege, Sir, is due to an old soldier,
Who brooks not easily to see his child,
The last loved scion of a noble stock,
Dishonored by alliance with a traitor.
What ! start you at the name ! yet shudder not
To be the thing it imports ! O ! 'tis squeamish in you,
And suits not with the boldness of rebellion !

ALASCO.

Reproach, when privileged, Sir, is not so keen,
But honor in a noble cause may bear it.

WALSINGHAM.

A noble cause !—O ! monstrous blasphemy !
The cause of mutiny—of mad revolt !
Convulsion—anarchy ! the last resource,
Of bankrupt knaves, and needy profligates !
Wretches, whom envy of all nobleness,
Transforms to fiends, and qualifies for traitors !
“ A cause the ruffian flies to, as a sanctuary !
“ Where sin and shame find grace and fellowship,
“ Where outcast crimes, and unhang'd iniquities,
“ Are sheltered 'midst the general perfidy,
“ And shuffled in the pack !

ALASCO.

Your pardon, Sir,

If I forbear to plead, and in this cause,
Decline your jurisdiction—" there's a chord,
" That vibrates here, which touches not your breast ;"
You're not a native, Sir, nor to the soil
Deep rooted by those fibres of the heart,
That bind us to the magic circle, called
Our country—No ! you cannot feel as I do.

WALSINGHAM.

If not a native, I am a subject here—
A soldier, faithful to his king—a citizen,
Who loves the country where he has found a home—
A father, that would guard his hearth from violence,
His child from ruin, and his age from shame.
Gods ! is it come to this !—But one word more, Alasco—
I would adjure you, by the name you bear !

ALASCO.

It once belonged to freemen.

WALSINGHAM.

By the blood !
The noble blood that circles in your veins !

ALASCO.

'Tis tainted in the bosom of a slave.

WALSINGHAM.

By your long line of gallant ancestors !

ALASCO.

They rise—they rise before me, and upbraid
Their base descendant, who submits to live

In abject servitude. With grief and rage,
They look around, where once an empire stood,
And cry, with indignation, 'Where's our country?'

WALSINGHAM.

When you have drench'd her deep in civil gore—
"When torn and ravaged by the fangs of war,
"She weeps in blood, and bondage more severe,"
They'll find their hapless country, by her groans,
And shudder in their sepulchres. "What fiend—
"What devil has breathed on earth this patriot pestilence,
"And struck the world with lunacy!" A day—
An hour of mad revolt and anarchy,
Inflicts more ills on a distracted state,
Than could a century of that settled sway,
You slander as misrule and tyranny.

ALASCO.

*Had fear, or feeling sway'd against redress
Of public wrong, man never had been free;
The thrones of tyrants had been fix'd as fate,
And slavery seal'd the universal doom.*
The heart may weep the wounds of civil strife,
But liberty can heal them.

WALSINGHAM.

Liberty!

By Heaven! the word has been profaned so long,
It shocks an honest ear: 'tis now the cry
Of ruffians, who mean massacre and rapine;

A spell that's used to conjure up from hell,
The blackest fiends of blood and desolation.
Madman, beware ! what would your folly prompt—
Your frenzy perpetrate ?

ALASCO.

I would raise up
My prostrate country—bid her breathe again—
Replace her on her pedestal of fame—
Teach her brave sons to spurn a foreign yoke—
To live with liberty, or die with honor.

WALSINGHAM.

Oh ! my unhappy child ! lost—lost Amantha !
But let me steel my bosom to the task
I have now to execute. The father's heart
May break—the soldier will perform his duty.
True to my king, my honor, and my oath,
Old as I am, you'll find me in the field.
Your patriot sword may there sustain its fame,
And plunge into the loyal breast of Walsingham !

[*Exit* WALSINGHAM.]

ALASCO (*solus.*)

He said that I should find him in the field—
And he will keep his word. The thought is dreadful !
Could I distrust my cause, or waver in it,
This were a thing to shake me ! Powers divine !
Shall right and wrong shift colours thus, and shew
In such discordant hues to honest optics !

“ Shall man still war with man, bewilder'd thus,
“ 'Midst shadows and uncertainties of good,
“ In moral anarchy ! Mysterious Providence !
“ What is it we call virtue ! Why is it not
“ Clear as the light—as noonday palpable !
“ That all, as to the glorious sun, might bow,
“ In prompt, unerring homage. Why are we left
“ To wander in the puzzling maze of doubt,
“ Misled by vain chimeras from our course,
“ Or setting up some idol of the mind,
“ To triumph in the worship due to truth,
“ And rival the divinity of virtue !”

Enter JEROME.

Good father, welcome ! You're disturb'd !

JEROME.

My son !

If you would shun destruction, go not home :
A plan is form'd to seize you in your bed,
To burn your ancient dwelling to the ground,
And give a loose to pillage 'mongst your friends.

ALASCO.

I am not wholly unprepared for this :
The rage of Hohendahl, I thought, might prompt
To such result.—“ But how were you apprized of it ?

JEROME.

“ A servant of the Baron's is my penitent—

“ The willing agent once of his misdeeds,
“ He now repents him, and would make atonement.

ALASCO.

“ Can you rely upon him ?

JEROME.

“ Perfectly.—

“ ’Twas he first warn’d me of Amantha’s danger,
“ And aided my concealment.”—To return,
Were madness.

ALASCO.

Fear it not, my friend ;—I’m call’d
By matter of more moment. Yes, good Jerome !
There’s now on foot an enterprize, which leaves
No leisure for a thought of private injury ;
But to unfold it, were a confidence
Ill suited to thy function.—One request—

JEROME.

My son, I am a minister of peace—
“ My age, my office, and my nature, plead
“ Good will to all, and general charity :”
But I’ve a heart, and cannot quite forget,
I had a country.

ALASCO.

When we meet again,
We shall commune more freely.—To your charge,
My reverend friend, I leave a virgin wife ;

Suspicion has already waked her fears :
I dare not trust me to the scrutiny
Of love alarm'd. Should adverse fate decree
We meet no more, restore her to her father ;
Give her this ring—her dying mother's gift,
And tell her, Jerome ! in Alasco's heart,
Amantha had no rival but his country !

[*Exit* ALASCO.

JEROME.

Heaven guard thy worth, and aid a righteous cause !

[*Exit* JEROME.

SCENE II.

The Interior of a Cavern, with arms and accoutrements strewed around. CONRAD, MALINSKI, BRANIKI, RIENSKI, and several other Chiefs of the Insurgents, in council, sitting at a rustic table, on which papers and writing materials are placed.—MALINSKI, with a Pen in his hand, making out a list of names—RIENSKI sitting as President.

RIENSKI.

Conrad, you are warm, and misconceive Malinski.
Engaged, as we are, in a noble cause,
Contention now were fatal to our hopes.

CONRAD.

Then let our conduct, like our cause, be noble.
I do not seek contention, gentlemen !
Nor will I turn me from an honest course,
To shun it.

MALINSKI.

Conrad, I perceive your aim ;
Tis to thwart me, that you would shield this Walsing-
ham :
He is no friend of yours.

CONRAD.

No. If he were,
And you had mark'd him on your bloody scroll,
By Heaven ! my sword had soon effaced the record.

RIENSKI.

“ He is reported haughty, proud, and arrogant ;
“ A scorner of the people, whom he holds,
“ As a base rabble, who should thank their stars,
“ When let to live, and labour for their betters.

CONRAD.

“ Yes, he is proud, and raves of his high blood,
“ As if some purer current swell'd his breast,
“ Than the dull puddle of plebeian veins.
“ With him, the patriot's always knave or fool :
“ A fruit unpluck'd, that ripens to a traitor.
“ What he calls loyalty, is his religion,

“ And he damns all, as infidels, who dare
“ To question the divinity of kings.”

RIENSKI.

Why, then, are you so forward to defend him ?

CONRAD.

Because I hate hypocrisy, and scorn
The artifice that covers base revenge.
Walsingham's a brave old soldier, and deserves
A better fate, than to be thus dispatched
By malice, in a muster-roll of knaves.

MALINSKI.

Malice !

CONRAD.

Yes ! malice. I don't wear a mask,
Nor play the patriot for my private ends.
“ I would not make a poignard of my pen,
“ To stab the foe whom I have fear'd to face.”

MALINSKI.

Dare you insinuate—

CONRAD.

No, I assert.

MALINSKI.

What ?

CONRAD.

That you're a knave, Malinski.

MALINSKI.

A knave !

CONRAD.

Yes, to be knave's promotion for a fool,
And you should thank me for the title.

MALINSKI.

Gods !

Shall I bear this insolence !

[Draws—the rest interfere to prevent him.]

CONRAD.

Nay, let him rage—
I have a specific here for his complaint,

[Draws.]

That never fail'd me.

RIENSKI.

Gentlemen, for shame !

“ Shall friends and fellows in a glorious enterprize,
“ Forget their country, in an idle brawl ? ”
And Conrad, you—the soul of all our councils !
What discontents you, that in anger thus,
You flash upon your friends ?

CONRAD.

Then, to be plain,
I do not like this process we're engaged in.
I am a soldier ; and in way of trade,
Have seldom been thought squeamish with my foes,
When dealing face to face, and hand to hand ;—
But in this cold-blood game of policy,
To play with lives like counters, and to sit

Like undertakers, measuring men for shrouds—

'Tis not a soldier's office !

RIENSKI.

These are scruples,

Fantastic honor starts in gallant minds ;

'Twere weakness to indulge them.—Count Alasco !

[*They all rise.*]

Enter ALASCO.

Welcome, brave chief ! our sanction and our strength !

Your presence breathes new vigour in our hearts,

And winds up our intents at once to action.

ALASCO.

Brave friends and countrymen ! why late I come

Amongst you, and so long have stood aloof,

As one who seem'd indifferent, or adverse

To the great cause that moves you, you have heard

Already from my friend. “ Known to you all,

“ E'en from the moment when the inspiring sounds,

“ ‘ My country ! ’ first struck deep into my soul,

“ And waked the patriot there ; ” you will not doubt

My zeal, though tardy. 'Tis indeed most true,

I have not stirr'd you to this enterprize,

“ Nor, busy with your discontents, essay'd

“ To force the unripen'd spirit of the time,

“ In fruitless contest with o'erwhelming power.”

I would not idly mouth your wrongs, nor seek

To fire the train of fury in your hearts,

Till injuries past sufferance, as past hope,
Should blaze the exploding vengeance on your foes,
And make it policy, as well as justice.
Revolt's a desperate game, that none should play,
Who feel they've ought to lose, which they prize more
Than liberty.

RIENSKI.

Noble Alasco ! we
Are all resolved to die, or free our country.

Several Voices.

“ All—all resolved on liberty or death ! ”

ALASCO.

O ! brave alternative, and worthy heroes !

“ How has my soul look'd anxious for this hour !

“ Now may we hope to have again a country.

They all draw their swords, and exclaim—

Alasco and our country !—liberty or death !

ALASCO.

Then, since your hearts are wound up to this pitch,
And, edged with wrongs, your unsuborned swords
Have leap'd their scabbards thus, behold ! at once
I pledge me to your purpose. “ And although
“ Some special reasons press upon my heart,
“ Why life, just now, should have some value with me,”
Yet from this moment, do I here suspend
All private functions—supersede all claims—
All duties of my station and degree,

Which might disturb me in this glorious course,
And give myself up wholly to my country.

MALINSKI.

We will assert our freedom, and inflict
A signal vengeance.

Several Voices.

Yes, revenge and liberty !

ALASCO.

Then let our liberty be our revenge.—
But now, my friends ! to business, for the time
Is critical. His late defeat, I fear,
Has startled Hohendahl to vigilance,
And waked him to a danger he despised.
Let each man muster all his force, and march
In midnight silence to the appointed ground,
Behind the Abbey Church. To-morrow's dawn
Must see us in the field. If we surprise
The castle, ere such succours shall arrive,
As may defy our strength, we strike a blow,
That sets wise speculation on our side,
And wins at once the wavering multitude.

MALINSKI.

By Heaven ! we'll burn the castle to the ground,
And in its ruins bury all its inmates.

“ 'Twill strike a wholesome terror to the foe.

ALASCO.

“ Yes, and make foes of all whose hearts recoil,

“ From wanton violence, and blind destruction.”

Sir ! let us fight like men, in the fair field,—
Strike, where our liberties demand the blow,—
But spare, where only cowards would inflict it.

MALINSKI.

We may be too magnanimous, my Lord,
And in our lenity, betray our country.

ALASCO.

Nay, do not hold that maxim ! of all traitors,
The worst is he, who stains his country's cause
With cruelty ; making it hideous in
The general eye, and fearful to its friends.

MALINSKI.

“ We must not shrink from blood, if we would hope
“ Success.

ALASCO.

“ Nor shed it wantonly, would we
“ Deserve it, Sir—
“ What props oppression's throne in every age,
“ And shields the tyrant from the o'erwhelming wrath
“ Of a whole people, crushed beneath his sway ?
“ The fear of civil strife ! the appalling dread
“ Of anarchy, with uproar at his heels,
“ Sweeping o'er friend and foe. This—this it is,
“ That like a palsy, at the patriot's heart,
“ Shakes his firm purpose—to his eye presents
“ The passions raging—shews him fell revenge,

“ With cowardly proscription at his side,
“ Hurling the public wrath, at his own enemy ;
“ In freedom’s name committing all excess.”

CONRAD.

By Mars ! that touches home. (*aside*) Then as our
chief,

’Tis fit that you peruse this document.

[*Takes up the paper and presents it to* ALASCO.

ALASCO.

What is its purport, Conrad ?

CONRAD.

O ! promotions !

The staff of a new corps of skeletons—
A kind of scarecrow company !—to serve
In shrouds and winding sheets—“ Malinski’s plan,
“ To strike a wholesome terror to the foe.”

ALASCO (*reading.*)

What ! a proscription !—Colonel Walsingham !

CONRAD.

Yes, yes ! you’ll find some friends upon the list.

RIENSKI.

Conrad ! your humour lacks discretion here ;
“ That list denounces men convicted long
“ As our worst enemies : it but confirms
“ The sentence of unexecuted justice.”

MALINSKI.

There’s not a man among us but may plead,

A spirit smarting from some grievous wrong,
To justify his vengeance.

ALASCO.

Sir, what wrong
Procured the honored name of Walsingham,
A place on such a list?

MALINSKI.

He is an Englishman!

ALASCO.

Yes, and his virtues well sustain a name
Long dear to freedom.

MALINSKI.

He's a heretic!
Foe to our faith, our freedom, and our country.
But—he has a handsome daughter.

ALASCO.

Sir, beware!

That lady's name is not to be profaned
By vulgar mouths, nor mingled with the sounds,
That from a ruffian's tongue, would stimulate
To murder.

MALINSKI.

Murder!

CONRAD.

Never flinch, man! no!
“The father's life should pay the daughter's scorn.

ALASCO (*looking round with indignation.*)

And have you all combined in this foul compact?
All signed and sealed this instrument of blood?
Are we met here, in dark conspiracy,
To club our mite of malice and revenge—
For each, with cunning cowardice to graft
His private wrongs upon the public stock,
And make the state his champion?

RIENSKI.

Noble Alasco!

If we, through over zeal, have erred in this,
You are our chief, and may annul our purpose.

ALASCO. (*tearing the paper.*)

Then, thus I use my privilege!—sacred powers!
I thought I had joined me to a noble band,
“Prepared to brave all dangers for their country!”
“Who only in her tyrants saw their foes,
And grasped their swords, but as the means of freedom.

RIENSKI.

And such, we dare assert, our deeds shall prove us.

ALASCO.

Away! you'll crouch like slaves, or kill like cowards—
What! you have swords! by Heaven! you dare not use
them.

A sword's the brave man's weapon—you mistake
Your instruments—knives—daggers best become you!
Heavens! am I leagued with cut throats and assassins!
With wretches who at midnight lurk in caves,

To mark their prey, and meditate their murders !
Well then ! to your office !—if you must stab,
Begin with me ;—here—here, plant all your daggers !
Much rather would I as your victim die,
Than live as your accomplice.

RIENSKI.

Spare us, my Lord !
Nor press this past endurance ; your reproof
Has sunk into our hearts, and shamed away
All passions but for freedom, and our country.

ALASCO.

Your country's freedom ! say, your own discharge
From wholesome rule and honest industry !—
You mean immunity for blood and spoil ;—
The privilege of wild riot and revenge ;—
The liberty of lawless depredation.
“ O ! my unhappy country ! what shall cure
“ Thy sicklied state, when e'en thy remedies,
“ Thus threatening worse disease, and deeper injury,
“ Unnerve th' administering hand, that shakes with fear,
“ To make thy case more desperate !”

CONRAD (*advancing earnestly.*)

O ! brave friends !

Or let me close this breach, or perish in it !
For 'tis a gap that's wide enough for ruin.
“ Noble Alasco ! though our friends have erred,
“ Misled by crafty counsel, sure 'twere hard,

“ Should all our hopes be wrecked upon this rock,
“ And our grieved country lose her chance of freedom.”
Come ! let us clear our honor, and our cause,
At once, from this foul taint ; let each man here,
Who bears a patriot’s heart, draw forth his sword,
And on that hallowed cross, the soldier holds
An emblem of his faith, defence, and service,
Swear to repress all promptings of revenge,
All private interests, ends, and enmities ;
And as he hopes for honor, fame, or safety,
Seek alone, his country’s weal, and freedom.

*[The chiefs all draw their swords, kneel down, and
kiss the hilts.]*

RIENSKI.

We swear—and as our hearts are in the oath,
So may our wishes prosper !

ALASCO (*kneels also.*)

Record it, Heaven !

And in a cause so just, vouchsafe thy guidance.

[They all rise.]

This solemn sanction, Conrad, reassures me.

Now, once again, I pledge me to your fortunes.

“ So may the power, that moulds the heart of man

“ To Heaven’s high purpose, breathe into our souls

“ The energies of virtue—turn our thoughts

“ To grasp the general good—secure in right,

“ And strong in honesty”—my friends, your hands !

Whate'er of comment harsh, in heat has passed,
To chafe, or wound one generous spirit here,
Your candour, Sirs, will in its cause excuse.

RIENSKI.

The fault is ours—we own it, and our swords
To-morrow shall redeem it on the foe.

ALASCO.

Then, to our work like men, who are fit for liberty !
“ Shall we, who lift our swords against a tyrant,
“ O'eract his part ourselves !—shall we install
“ The fiend Revenge, in triumph on his throne !—
“ Bid havoc and confusion rage around,
“ Till in some breathless pause of blood and tumult,
“ The despot comes again to close the scene,
“ And finish the catastrophe of freedom.
“ No, let us prove that man—unshackled man—
“ Is not a maniac wretch, whose frantic hand
“ Still turns against himself, and strikes at all
“ He should respect and reverence—let us prove,
“ At least, that we are worthy of our cause ;”
Fierce in the field as tigers, for our rights,
But when the sword is sheathed, the friends of peace,
And firm, for law and justice. [*Exeunt.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT IV.—SCENE I.

A Hall in Baron HOHENDAHL's Castle.

Enter the Baron, SWARTSBURG, Officers and Attendants.

HOHENDAHL.

To blame! you're all to blame! more zealous service
Had used a better speed, and pounced upon him.

SWARTSBURG.

My Lord, we used all diligence, but he
Was absent on suspicion of our purpose.

HOHENDAHL.

“ I tell thee, Swartsburg, there's within these walls,
“ Some treasonous leak that lets out all our counsels.
“ He must have had some wind of our intent,
“ To foil it thus, and with such sweeping haste,
“ Withdraw him, and his household from our grasp.
“ You say they all escaped you.

SWARTSBURG.

“ All, my Lord !

“ We found his halls dispeopled—half dismantled.
“ In every room, Disorder's hurried hand
“ Had scattered round her spoils,—no life appeared—
“ So absolute—so blank the solitude.

“ We thought, at first, ’twas studied, and took guard
“ Against an ambush.”

HOHENDAHL.

Curse upon his caution !

By Heaven ! this daring Count Alasco galls me,—
Baffled—disgraced—surprised upon my post !—
Braved in the very jaws of my authority,
By a base rabble !—what boots it me I say !
“ That you’ve made war upon his empty walls,
“ And sacked his cellars, till your reeling wrath,
“ Turned all around to smoking desolation,
“ Since he has escaped my vengeance ?—Other means
“ Must reach him. Where’s Rudolpho ?

SWARTSBURG.

“ He has paid
“ His forfeit in a game he loved too well.
“ ’Twould seem, that in some desperate scuffle foiled,
“ His tyger spirit failed him.

HOHENDAHL.

“ Is he dead ?

SWARTSBURG.

“ E’en so ! we found him in the forest slain,
“ With one of his assistants lying near ;
“ Both pierced with many wounds.

HOHENDAHL.

“ Then his attack
“ On Walsingham has failed ! (*aside*) Some forest fray,

“ With his old enemy. I feel his loss :

“ He was a genuine blood hound, fierce and faithful !

SWARTSBURG.

“ His savage nature stirred up many foes.”

But were it not well, my Lord, to sound th’ alarm,
And reinforce the guard ?

HOHENDAHL.

What wouldst thou, Swartsburg ?

Are we not here,—aroused from our first sleep,
Like monks at matins, yawning on our posts,
To satisfy thy fears ?

SWARTSBURG.

My fears, my Lord !

Precaution is not fear, but vigilance,

“ A virtue not unworthy of a soldier.”

The movements I’ve reported speak some danger.

HOHENDAHL.

Movements ! “ what movements have in Swartsburg

“ roused

“ This vaunted soldier’s virtue ?

SWARTSBURG.

“ Such as mark

“ Too plain, th’ approach of tumult : as we passed,

“ We could perceive each village broad awake,

“ As in mid day—lights glimmered to and fro,

“ And bustle hurried on from house to house,—

“ Low murmurs filled the air—as every wind

“ Were whispering in the startled ear of night,
“ The unusual agitation : beacons blazed
“ On every hill—while, from the horizon’s line,
“ As if in concert kindled, sudden stars
“ Shot forth their answering fires : as morning neared,
“ Commotion heaved around us, like a sea,
“ That wave o’er wave impelled, seemed rushing on,
“ To break against our bulwarks.

HOHENDAHL.

“ Then shall our bulwarks dash them back again !”
By Heaven ! it shames me Swartsburg that a soldier,
Who knows the face of danger, and has braved
Its most appalling aspect, should thus swell,
To such a perilous shape and magnitude,
This plough-tail tumult—this insurgency
Of hostile boors, and mobs in martial movement :
I know the slaves are mutinous, and love
A riot dearly—mischief is their element,
And plunder the sole privilege they desire ;
But when our bull-dogs bark, they’re soon sent scam-
pering.

Enter a GUARD in haste.

Well, Sir ! the news !

GUARD.

My Lord, reports have reached
The outer guard, that all the peasantry
Are up in arms.

HOHENDAHL.

In arms, thou slave, in arms !

What ! flourishing their flails, and shouldering pitch-forks !

Thou lookest in no small dread of those dire instruments.

Enter a Second GUARD.

What ! rumours still of war !—come, Sir, your tale !

SECOND GUARD.

My Lord ! the rebel standard has been raised :

Ere dawn, th' insurgents met in multitudes,

Behind the abbey church ; a scout reports,

That they've already seized the arsenal,

And led by Count Alasco, now in force,

Are marching on the castle.

HOHENDAHL.

Seized the arsenal !

Why this is well !—this looks like business, Swartsburg !

Perdition catch the cowards, who could yield

To such assailants !—Sir, there's treachery here,

As well as tumult.—Seized the arsenal have they ?

Ring loud the alarum—call out all the guards ;

Although they come unasked, we'll forth to welcome them.

By Heaven ! we'll lash these raggamuffins home,

And score them such a reckoning on their backs,

As they shall long remember o'er their cups,

To pay for this day's frolic.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE II.

An open Country—the Castle seen in the distance.

Enter ALASCO, CONRAD, RIENSKI, BRANIKI, and the other Chiefs of the Insurgents, with a body of armed peasants, shouting.

Several voices.

Alasco, and liberty—hurra!—hurra!

ALASCO.

Thus far, my friends, has fortune graced our cause,
And given good earnest of her future favors.
In braver hands, the arsenal might have held
Our force at bay, and in its outset check'd
Our gallant enterprize.

CONRAD.

They never dream'd
That we should have the boldness to attack them;
And when they found their error, we contrived
To puzzle them in their panic.

ALASCO.

Now, thank Heaven!

Each patriot hand may grasp a goodly sword,
And try its temper on our country's tyrants.
Have you supplied the different corps with arms?

CONRAD.

They're all provided nobly :—we've exchanged
Our armoury, for tools of better fashion.
Each man has match'd him to his heart's content,
“ And now our war looks gay in golden hilts,
“ Well burnish'd blades, and rich accoutrements.
“ There was a rare assortment for our purpose ;—
“ Sabres to suit all fancies—cut or thrust ;
“ Ferraras fit to slice you like a cucumber ;
“ Toledo-temper'd points, to pick out life,
“ Without a twitch, a wriggle, or a wry face ;”
Guns, pistols, pikes, and poignards, weapons all
So rich emboss'd in curious workmanship,
It were almost a compliment to kill
With such rare instruments.

ALASCO.

An idle coxcombry !

But thus it is, we garb in gayest trim
The monster, War, and decorate Destruction.
“ Befurr'd and feather'd—mask'd in pomp and show,
“ The gaudy pageant struts, in folly's eye,
“ As he were meant a toy for pleasure deck'd,
“ And mountebank amusement.

CONRAD.

“ O ! severe !

“ You would not, surely, mantle him in a shroud,
“ And manœuvre him to the tune of a dead march—

- “ Hang him round with escutcheons, like a hearse,
“ Or trim his coat to the cut of a skeleton?
“ No, no—our soldiers must be gay and gorgeous;
“ Gaiety is the bosom-friend of valour—
“ The very soul of war—the antidote
“ To fear—the softener of ferocity.
“ How oft, as to a ball, we’ve gone to battle!
“ Without one ruffled feeling towards the foe,
“ Save what our duty call’d for!

ALASCO.

“ True, my friend!

- “ His generous enmity, and gallant spirit,
“ Mark the brave soldier from the brutal savage,
“ Who thirsts for blood, and counts his scalps as
“ trophies.
“ We fight to conquer, not to kill our enemy;
“ And should appeal to war, but as the great
“ Corrective of the world—the caustic cure
“ Of ills too obstinate for milder treatment.
“ But let the giant of calamity
“ Put on his proper visage, and look grim,
“ As when of old, in flashing armour clad,
“ Or garb’d in grave habiliments, to suit
“ His stern authority, and direful office.”

Enter a Guard.

My Lord, the chief, Malinski, has betray’d
His post, and fled.

CONRAD.

I thought 'twould come to this.

“ When cowardice and cruelty unite,

“ They’re sure to breed a traitor.”

ALASCO.

Who have shared

In his defection ?

GUARD.

Few of his own corps ;

But some marauding stragglers from the hills,

Have join’d his flight.

ALASCO.

I would that every knave

He has left behind, might strip the patriot cloak,

And follow him. Such ruffian spirits taint

The cause of freedom. They repel its friends;

And so disfigure it by blood and violence,

That good men start, and tremble to embrace it.

But now, my friends, a sterner trial waits us.—

Within yon castle’s walls we sleep to-night,

Or die to-day before them. Let each man

Preserve the order of advance, and charge,

As if he thought his individual sword

Could turn the scale of fate. String every heart

To valour’s highest pitch ;—fight, and be free !

This is no common conflict, set on foot,

For hireling hosts to ply the trade of war,—

“ No question now, what form of civil sway,
“ What king, or priest, or faction, shall prevail.”
Our’s is a nobler quarrel—we contend
For what’s most dear to man, wherever found—
Free or enslaved—a savage, or a sage ;—
The very life and being of our country.
’Tis ours, to rescue from the oblivious grave,
** Where tyrants have combined to bury them,—*
A gallant race—a nation—and *her fame,—*
To gather up the fragments of our state,
And in its cold, dismember’d body, breathe
The living soul of empire. Such a cause
Might warm the torpid earth, put hearts in stones,
And stir the ashes of our ancestors,
Till from their tombs our warrior sires come forth,
Range on our side, and cheer us on to battle.
Strike, then, ye patriot spirits, *for your country!*
Fight and be free!—for liberty and Poland.

[*Exeunt*

* The author cannot forbear to direct the attention of the reader to the suppressed passages of this page: the discriminating taste with which the poison of patriotism is detected, in seditious syllables, hemistiches, and half sentences, very strikingly illustrates the utility of a licenser of plays.

SCENE III.

A Field of Battle—Armed Parties pass over the distant part of the Stage.

AMANTHA enters hastily, in great disorder, followed by
JEROME.

JEROME.

Return, my child—return; where wouldst thou fly?
Madness alone, in such a fearful scene,
Would wander thus.—O! hear, Amantha!—hear me!

AMANTHA.

Away! away! [Runs out.

JEROME.

My aged limbs refuse
To follow her. Good angels guard her innocence!
To what is she exposed!

AMANTHA enters wildly at another part of the
Stage.

AMANTHA.

Where!—where! good Heaven!
O cruel, cruel father! my Alasco too!
Where shall I seek?—O! God! where shall I find
them?

They've left me—both have left me to destruction,
On mutual slaughter bent.

JEROME.

Patience, my child !

AMANTHA.

Urge me no more, old man—no more, I tell thee !
Alas ! I'm harsh,—good father, heed me not,
“ For I grow wild, and feel my nature changed,
“ That I could almost quarrel with thy kindness.”
But leave me to myself—I have business here.

JEROME.

Alas ! alas ! I tremble for thy wits.
“ Thou hast no business in a scene like this.
“ Death flies around us here.”—Return, my child—
Our safety's in the Abbey.

AMANTHA.

Safety ! Friar !

Thou call'st it safety, to be shut secure
From all that harms the body ; and, indeed,
'Tis such to thee, for thy calm spirit knows
No other dangers. I have that within,
Which scorns the body's perils ; at my heart
A giant horror sits, that suffers not
Th' approach of pigmy fears.

JEROME.

Alas ! what thought !

What dreadful thought absorbs thee so, Amantha,
That thus, with nerve unshaken, thou canst brave
Such perils as thy gentle nature else
Had shudder'd but to think on?

AMANTHA.

Such a thought,
As, were it but in action verified,
Would dash distemper'd reason from her seat,
And shut my soul from this world's peace for ever!

JEROME.

Good Heavens! what horrid image thus—

AMANTHA.

Last night!

Last night, I saw my mother in my sleep!
“If sleep it can be call'd, which seem'd in consciousness,
“Intense and quick as waking agony.
“Nay, start not as incredulous, but hear!
“A close, half-whispering motion at my side,
“Dispersed the vague and shadowy forms that roll
“In slumber's common chaos, and appear'd
“As summoning all the evidence of sense,
“To mark, with thrilling eagerness and awe,
“An agency more real and mysterious.”
Instant, in breathless terror as I lay,
My mother's sainted image stood before me—
Clear as in life—so plain—so palpable—
Had I the power to move, I could have touch'd her.

With pale and piteous aspect she beheld me,
And laid her wither'd hand upon my heart.
O! God! the chill that shiver'd through my frame,
From that cold hand!

JEROME.

And can a dream, my child,
Have power to move you thus?

AMANTHA.

A dream! but hear!

A moment fix'd she stood, and gazed upon me,
With looks of woe and pity, past all utterance;
Then, bending forward, press'd her clammy lips
To mine. She spoke—I heard her well-known voice;
But though her words seem'd whispering in my ear,
And all my soul stretch'd gasping for their purport,
I caught no sound articulate of speech.
She then, with solemn action, motioned me,
To rise, and follow her;—compelled by some
Resistless impulse, I obeyed;—she led
Through lonely avenues and gloomy groves;—
O'er wild and waste;—through dismal church-yard paths,
Where moaning winds, and muttering sounds of night,
Make up the talk of tombs.—At length, a grave,—
A yawning grave, before me, stopped our course,
And shewed, half buried in its loathsome jaws,
Two desperate men, with most unhallowed rage,
Contending o'er the uncoffined corse within.

“ Fiercely they fought, and each, with frantic hand,
“ Snatched from the mouldering fragments of the dead,
“ His weapon of assault and sacrilege,
“ In fiend-like profanation.”—All aghast !

I turned me, shuddering, from the hideous sight,
To seek my mother’s shade ;—but she had vanished :
’Twas then I felt, her presence which before
Appalled me, had been now a refuge to me ;—
And I seemed lost in losing it. Again,
I fearful turned to that dread spectacle ;—
It was my mother’s grave !—the uncoffined corse
Was her’s,—the furious men—O God ! I saw,
In those ferocious—frantic—fiend-like men,
Who tore her sacred relics from the earth,
My father and my husband !—Powers of mercy !

JEROME.

Be calm, be calm, my child !—

AMANTHA.

At sight of me,
Though writhing—raging in each other’s grasp,
They ceased their horrid strife, and both at once,
Combining all their wrath, rushed forth to seize me ;
I gasped—I struggled—but my cries gave out
No sound—my limbs benumbed and powerless, seemed
As life had left them ;—with united strength,
They dragged me down to that dark cave of death,
Where my poor parent lay, and were about

To close me in for ever, when despair,
In one wild shriek of horror, burst its way,
From out my quivering lips, and left me senseless.
Returning reason found me in my chamber,
Exhausted—weak—and wondering at my safety.

JEROME.

O! my poor child! regard not these illusions.—
Disturbed by life's events, our minds in sleep,
Work out most strange chimeras of the brain,
And all we suffer mix with all we fear,
In combinations wild and monstrous.

AMANTHA.

Aye,

I know what 'tis to dream;—to whirl and toss
In the wild chaos of distempered sleep;—
“To pant and suffocate, in horrid strife,
“Shaking the monster night-mare from the breast.
“I have been pursued by goblins,—hideous forms,
“Agape to swallow me;—have breathless hung
“Upon the slippery verge of some vast precipice,
“And sliding down, have grasped, in thrilling agony,
“Some slender twig, or crumbling fragment there,
“To save me from the yawning gulph below;”
But such a dream as this, I have not known—
“So stamp'd with truth—so certified to sense—
“So characterized in all that marks to man,
“Life's waking dreams, from sleep's close counterfeit.”

I tell thee, father, such a dream might well
Disturb the tests of strong reality,—
Confound the forms, and substances of things;—
Astonish truth herself, with her own attributes,
And shake the heart of daring incredulity.

JEROME.

All, all, the wild creation of your fears—
The idle phantoms of a feverish brain,
Rejected by religion, as by reason.

AMANTHA.

Have I not waked to dreadful certainty?—
To worse conviction of substantial horror?—
“Have they not rushed with most unnatural rage,
“To realize my fears—to verify
“The visions of despair?”—Hark! hark! that sound,
That dreadful sound recalls me to my purpose!
E’en while I speak, perhaps my father bleeds!—
And by my husband’s hand!—Madness and horror!
Hold! hold, Alasco!—hold thy barbarous hand!—
Respect his whitened age—he is my father!—
Oh, God!—that blow has felled him to the earth!—
Murder!—give me way!—I will not be restrained—
Save him! save him, Alasco!—*Oh, mercy! mercy!*—
[*Runs out distracted.*]

JEROME.

Almighty powers! her reason has given way:
Heaven grant me strength to follow and preserve her!

SCENE IV.

Another part of the Field—the Castle appearing in the distance—Soldier's of Hohendahl's party appear crossing the stage in flight and confusion, followed by the BARON, SWARTSBURG, MALINSKI, (who had deserted from the Insurgents) and other officers.

HOHENDAHL.

Slaves! stand your ground!—may all you fear confound ye!

A panic palsy shake you through your lives!

Ye souls of shreds and remnants!

Speed, Lindorf! to the castle, and command

That every man who has a limb to move,

Be mustered to our aid.—You, Sir, collect

[to another officer.]

Those rascal runaways that stain the name

Of soldier. Swartsburg! I shall burst with rage!—

The cowards! * *Hell's hot blisters* on the backs

They turn so basely!

* *Hell's hot blisters.*

The official critic here takes new ground—his delicacy rejects this expression as a matter of taste; he being one of those scrupulous observers of decorum—

“That would not mention hell to ears polite.”

SWARTSBURG.

We must better estimate
Our enemy. My Lord, these clodpoles give us
Rough encounter.

HOHENDAHL.

By Heaven! they fight as if

It is to be hoped his zeal will induce him to employ some of that "otium cum dignitate," which his new office provides for him, in giving to the world an "editio expurgata" of our principal dramatists: a "Shakspeare" reformed, according to the official standard of politics and politeness, would be a great acquisition to the stage. We should then be no longer shocked by such naughty illustrations of passion, character, and situation, as the unpolished and uncourtly bard of Avon has supplied, in the following instances.

MACBETH, ACT 5, SCENE 2.

"The devil damn thee black! thou cream-faced loon."

RICHARD 3, ACT 1, SCENE 3.

"Down, down to hell, and say I sent thee thither."

DITTO.

"Then since the heavens have shaped my body so,

"Let hell make crooked my mind to answer it."

Indeed the whole play of "Richard the Third," must be considered as little better than a standing outrage on the new principle of dramatic propriety, and doubtless, our loyal licenser will proceed forthwith, to expel it from the stage,—since the bare word tyrant is no more to be endured there, his respect for the "Divinity which doth hedge a king," will no longer tolerate such a representation of "the Lord's anointed," as Shakspeare has presumed to draw in the character of "crooked-back Richard."

VENICE PRESERVED, ACT 5, SCENE 4.

Belvidera.

"Hell! hell!

"Burst from the centre, rage and roar aloud

"If thou art half so hot, so mad as I am."

The devil himself had drilled them for the field,
And taught them all his tactics.

SWARTSBURG.

“ Thrice, their leader
“ Charged on our line, and forced it like a wedge.

HOHENDAHL.

“ Base rebel ! he shall rue his generalship.”

MALINSKI.

I fear we've not yet felt his utmost strength.
Perhaps 'twere wise to wait for succour, and
Withdraw within the castle.

HOHENDAHL.

What !—withdraw ?

Retreat before the sweepings of our fields ?
“ The very dregs of tumult, stirred by knaves,
“ To foam in frantic uproar for a day !—”
Who is the quaking renegade that dares
Insult us with such counsel ?—our new ally !—
The loyal chief, Malinski !—you would, Sir,
Entrench your prudent valour, and peep out
From parapets, and loopholes on the foe.

MALINSKI.

My Lord, you wrong me ;—

HOHENDAHL.

Caitiff ! hast thou come
To breathe around the infection of thy fears !
I shall observe thee well ;—by this good sword !

If thou dost flinch, or waver in the fight,
I'll have thee scourged, and hooted back to those,
From whom thou fled'st, because they scorned thee,
coward !

MALINSKI.

My Lord ! my loyalty deserves—

HOHENDAHL.

A halter !

Thy loyalty !—he who has been once a rebel,
Is not less stained for being twice a traitor !

Enter an Officer.

OFFICER.

My Lord, some skirmishers have just brought in
Two prisoners ;—one, 'tis said, the Lady Walsingham.

HOHENDAHL.

Kind fortune, thou'rt my friend !

OFFICER.

“ They found her wild,
“ And wandering o'er the field, careless of danger ;
“ The Friar Jerome feebly following her.”

HOHENDAHL.

Conduct her to the castle instantly !
And charge they guard her as they would their lives.

“ Dismiss the priest.” *[Exit Officer.]*

Now ! now, my soul ! will victory
Be doubly sweet, thus seasoned by revenge !

Let fate but bring Alasco to my sword,
I ask no farther favour !—hark !—their trumpets !

[*Alarum.*

Soldiers ! prepare to charge—retrieve your honour !
If you have hearts, in furious onset, urge
Your weapons home ;—
And drive these mongrels howling to their kennels.

[*Exeunt.*

Scene continued.

The battle rages—trumpets sound, and parties engaged pass over the stage.—The BARON and ALASCO appear entering at the back scene, and skirmish to the front.

HOHENDAHL.

I asked of fate to meet thee.

ALASCO.

Then, thou’rt gratified.—

Before we part, you’ll find the boon is fatal.

Come on !—

HOHENDAHL.

“ My soul is thirsty for thy blood—

“ Else should I leave thee, traitor ! to the laws,

“ And not defraud the scaffold.”

ALASCO.

Villain ! no more !

“ Thou art too base for parley—defend thyself !

“ My country’s wrongs cry out for vengeance on thee,

“ And make my sword the instrument of justice.”

HOHENDAHL.

Yet one word more—I would not have thee die,

Till thou hast drain’d, e’en to the very dregs,

The cup of my revenge.—Hear, and despair !—

Thy lov’d Amantha’s lodged within the castle ;

Prepared, like Venus, to receive her Mars,

And crown, this night, my triumph o’er Alasco.

ALASCO.

Wilt thou, just Heaven ! permit this violation !—

Monster abhorr’d ! thou hast o’ercharged my heart,

And thus the double vengeance bursts upon thee !

[They fight—the Baron falls.]

HOHENDAHL.

Furies confound thee ! shalt thou thus prevail ?

ALASCO.

Thank Heaven ! once more, Amantha, thou art rescued.

HOHENDAHL.

Baffled in love and vengeance !—Fiends and devils !

Could I but close thee in this hug of death,

And disappoint thy raptures !

ALASCO.

Bear him from the field.

HOHENDAHL.

Slave, strike again !—I will not be thy prisoner—
E'en with this remnant of a life, I dare thee !

[Attempts to rise, but falls again, and is borne off.]

ALASCO.

Shall guilt and rage, grimacing valour thus,
Profane the courage that belongs to virtue !

Now, gallant friends ! press boldly on the foe.
Ere victory crown our banners, they must wave
O'er yon proud castle's walls. On, to the assault !
There is a treasure there, that fires my soul,
And to the patriot's, adds the lover's ardour.

[Trumpets sound retreat.]

Ha ! the signal of retreat ! it cannot be !

Enter CONRAD, hastily.

CONRAD.

Fly ! fly, my Lord Alasco ! all is lost !
If you would live to save or serve your country,
Fly !

ALASCO.

Such counsel's somewhat new from Conrad.

CONRAD.

“ He had not given it, if to fight or die
“ Could now avail.”

ALASCO.

What sad reverse confounds thee ?

CONRAD.

A sudden force has poured into the field,
And swept it like a tempest. Panic struck,
E'en in the moment of our victory,
At such unlook'd-for onset, all our bands,
Broken and scatter'd, fly like frightened hares,
Before the lion, Walsingham.

ALASCO.

What ! he !

Is Walsingham already in the field ?

CONRAD.

He leads their charge, and in his prowess, quite
Forgets his age.

ALASCO.

Then all is lost indeed !

I fear'd this cloud might burst upon our heads,
But not so suddenly. Disastrous chance !

CONRAD.

The foe draws near ; I fear not for myself ;
But thou art all the hope that's left for freedom,
Or for Poland.

ALASCO.

Brave Conrad ! thou and I
Were early tutor'd in the schools of war,
And went through some hard lessons ; but to fly
Was not amongst them : shall we now begin

To practise such a part? No, no, my friend.
There is but one resource for him whose sword
Has fail'd to free his country—'tis—to die!

CONRAD.

To die!—agreed—I had almost forgot
That game was on the cards.

ALASCO.

It is, my friend,
And we will play it nobly.

CONRAD.

Then, lead on!
To life or death; Alasco gives the word,
And when or where has Conrad failed to follow him?

ALASCO.

Let us then boldly rush upon our fate,
Like soldiers, sword in hand. Our names shall live
With honor in the records of the brave,
And tingle in the startled ear of tyrants.

*[As ALASCO is going off, he is met by WAL-
SINGHAM, who enters at the head of an ad-
vanced party of the victors. They regard
each other with great emotion, as they come
forward to the front of the stage—CONRAD
escapes.]*

WALSINGHAM.

And is it thus we meet, unhappy boy!

ALASCO.

We meet like men, whose fortune has prescribed
Hard duties—You, Sir, know yours.

WALSINGHAM.

I do—I do.

'Tis mine to strike rebellion to the earth,
Nor spare a traitor, though my heartstrings break,
To find one in Alasco!

ALASCO.

But for thee,
Success had stamp'd on him a different title,
And a freed people hail'd him as a hero.
Now—no matter!—this is no time for controversy.
A generous soldier will not wound with words,
When his good sword may serve him.

WALSINGHAM.

Mine has spill'd
No blood that shames it—these are rebel drops.

[Shewing his sword.]

ALASCO.

*They're tears that patriots weep when tyrants triumph ;
For freedom shed ;—they blister where they fall.*

WALSINGHAM.

O ! fatal, fatal phrenzy !—“ I've pursued
“ With steady step, the course mark'd out by duty :
“ A rigid course ! that brings me hopeless here,
“ To struggle in a crisis of my fate,

“ Beyond my age’s weakness.”

Sustain me now, ye idols of my life !

My honor and my fame !—Thou shouldst have died.

Alasco, in the field.

ALASCO.

’Twas my intent,

And may be still accomplish’d ; but, perhaps,

Thy loyal zeal may deem Alasco’s blood

Were on the public scaffold better shed,

In fit atonement for the crime of him

Who would have freed his country.

WALSINGHAM.

Cruel thought !

Thou shouldst have spared this aching heart that image.

“ Just Heaven ! am I reserved for this ?—decreed

“ To be the instrument of such a fate,

“ To him whom I have cherish’d as my child !”

Let me not think, lest madness seize my brain—

Lest my enfeebled spirit swerve at last,

And tarnish in its close, a life of honor.

Rebellion has been foil’d—thy followers

Dispersed in flight, or stretch’d upon the field,

Sad victims of thy mad ambition ! rue

Their folly and their crime. ’Midst such disaster,

Say, hast thou still a hope from farther contest ?

ALASCO.

My hope was for my country. ’Twas a light

That for a moment beam'd upon my soul ;—
A dawn of glory !—thou hast extinguish'd it.
As for myself—I neither hope nor fear.

WALSINGHAM.

Surrender, then, thy sword.

ALASCO.

Yes, with my life !

The sole condition upon which a soldier
Should require it. Nor will thy spirit shrink,
When thus Alasco calls thee to complete
The sacrifice that loyal duty claims
From Walsingham.

WALSINGHAM.

God of my fathers ! What !

Wouldst thou then spill more blood ?—still urge the
combat

Against this aged breast, and rush on death,
To take thy chance of parricide ? Most horrible !
Well, then, come on—thou hast already fix'd
A dagger here, that makes thy weapon pointless.

[WALSINGHAM and ALASCO rush towards
each other, as if with hostile intentions ;
when each, at the same moment, presents his
breast to the sword of the other ; they pause
for an instant—drop their swords, and rush
into each other's arms.

WALSINGHAM.

My son ! my son !

ALASCO.

My father ! O ! my father !

Forgive—forgive me, if I seem'd to urge
Thy gallant nature thus to mortal contest !
Death from thy hand had been received with joy,
And deem'd a boon of kindness to Alasco.

WALSINGHAM.

Alasco, thou hast raised a conflict here—
A warfare, where all griefs and agonies
Have met, and mingled their severest pangs,
To shake the soul of Walsingham. But 'tis past—
The voice of honor still is strong within him—

[Turning to his soldiers.

Brave comrades ! you behold a weak old man,
Whose worn-out spirit has but ill sustain'd
A trial too severe. But though o'erborne
A moment in the struggle—though unmann'd—
“ His tortured soul confess'd a father's anguish,”
Think not the soldier can forget his duty :—
“ To its last throb, this heart must still be loyal ;
“ Although it feels, 'tis firm !”—Seize the Count Alasco !
He's your prisoner.

ALASCO.

Nay, hang not back—Behold !

I offer no resistance. Thus subdued,
Alasco yields him on a father's summons ;
Else had he sought to purchase from your swords

A death more worthy of his cause and courage.
Think not of me, my father, nor deplore
Thy part in this sad scene. "On duty's path
"We have cross'd, with rough collision, and our hearts
"Have felt the shock. My fate appals me not."
The scaffold strikes no terrors to his soul,
**Who mounts it as a martyr for his country!*

[*Exeunt.*

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

* It is unnecessary to comment farther on the peculiar spirit which appears to have actuated the licenser in his censures of "Alasco"—had he anticipated the possibility that an unhappy dramatist could have the hardihood to rebel against his mandate, and lay open the nature and object of his operations, it is probable he would have been more on his guard, and might have qualified a little that eager hostility to every sentiment of patriotism and public virtue which he has so pointedly displayed; a hostility which must be as congenial to the feelings, as it is consistent with the interests, of a free people.

ACT V. SCENE I.

A Hall in the Abbey—JEROME enters, with a letter in his hand, followed by a Lay Brother.

JEROME.

These few wild words have swept away all hope :
His doom is seal'd—he dies upon the scaffold !
Dread Power ! thy will be done !—My poor Amantha !
How wilt thou bear this blow !

[To the Lay Brother.

“ Return with speed,

“ And say, I will not fail her. But, alas !

[Exit Lay Brother.

“ What balm has Jerome for a wound like this,
“ That kills the heart, and leaves the outward frame
“ But as the husk of life ?”

Enter a Lay Brother.

LAY BROTHER.

A stranger asks

Admission to the Prior.

JEROME.

Give him entrance.

[Exit Lay Brother.

[*Enter CONRAD, disguised, but immediately discovers himself.*

JEROME.

Conrad !

CONRAD.

The same.

JEROME.

How hast thou 'scaped, my son,
Amid the general wreck ?

CONRAD.

By flight—a means
I had not used to save a worthless life,
But for Alasco's service. You are his friend—
How fares it with him ?

JEROME.

As with one, whose fate
Will soon release him from all earthly cares.
[*Giving the letter.*
Read here his sentence.

CONRAD.

Ha ! already doom'd !
Eternal Providence is this thy justice !

JEROME.

“ Rash man ! forbear to question Heaven's decree.
“ Our duty is submission.

CONRAD.

“ Spare thy preaching ;

“ We soldiers brook but ill, a churchman’s discipline.
“ If thou wouldst have me hear thee, talk of blood,
“ Of death and ruin—rescue and revenge!
“ Or try the force of thy vocation, priest,
“ And interpose some miracle of prayer,
“ To succour suffering virtue.

JEROME.

“ On our heads
“ The chastening hand indeed falls heavily;
“ Nor can I wonder thy rough nature chafes,
“ Beneath the sore infliction.”—Yet, my son,
Have patience.

CONRAD.

Patience! ’tis a woman’s virtue—
The cold, tame tenant of enfeebled souls—
Offspring of fear and apathy.—No, no!
This stroke at once decides me. Brave Alasco!
Thou shalt not die alone.
We’ve had one cradle—we shall have one grave!
I’ll instant to the castle, and demand
To share his fate.

JEROME.

O! rush not on destruction—
There’s yet a gleam of hope. A sudden thought,
By Heaven suggested, sure, has flash’d upon me.
Since thou canst thus brave death, thou wilt not shrink
From danger, to achieve thy friend’s deliverance.

CONRAD.

Shew me a chance of safety for Alasco—
By Heaven ! I'll snatch it from the tiger's mouth,
Or tug for it with the devil.

JEROME.

Then hear, and mark me !

From the close dungeon where Alasco lies,
A secret passage leads, winding beneath
The castle's deep foundations, and beyond
Its outer walls.

CONRAD.

My soul hangs on thy words.

JEROME.

There ending in a cavern of the rock,
Whose dark recesses, peopled by all shapes
Of spectral horror—fiends and fairy tribes—
The progeny of fear and ignorance,
Have from its dreary precincts long deterr'd
All human footsteps.—Thou must surely know
The goblin's cave ?

CONRAD.

I do ; “ and well remember,
“ What terrors shook me, when a child, to hear
“ Of its wild wonders.

JEROME.

“ Oft, in times long past,
“ An aged follower of our house—a man

“ Most strange and wayward—one who loved me well,
“ Would lead me trembling through the dread abyss,
“ Would point where blood had been, and shuddering
start,
“ As our uncertain footsteps stumbled o’er
“ Some mouldering bone, that rattled in our path :
“ Then, muttering to himself, would darkly hint
“ Of dire misdeeds, and mysteries unrevealed,
“ That from the grave of memory rising, seem’d
“ To scare him into madness ; then would he groan,
“ And fiercely cry, “ Boy, down upon thy knees !
“ And let the prayers of innocence beseech
“ Heaven’s mercy on thy race !”

CONRAD.

Brief—brief, good father.

JEROME.

Darest thou explore this labyrinth, and attempt
To free thy noble friend ?

CONRAD.

I tell thee, Friar,

A soldier is not privileged, like a priest,
To start at shadows,—“ quake, and cry ‘ God save us !’
“ When the wind sings through key-holes.” Thou
canst name

No task of desperate peril, where my life
May be laid down with honor for Alasco,
That I can fear, or flinch from.

JEROME.

Then his fate
May be by Heaven averted, through thy means.
If thou canst reach his dungeon, and return
In safety with Alasco, thou shalt find,
Close by the cavern's mouth, beneath the cliff,
A boat prepar'd to waft you o'er the flood,
And baffle all pursuit.

CONRAD.

I will succeed,
Or perish.

JEROME.

Angels guide thee ! Let us retire :
I must instruct thee farther, and provide
What may be needful for thy enterprize.
Shouldst thou (which Heaven forbid !) mistake thy
course,
Through this wild catacomb, thou'rt lost for ever.

CONRAD.

Then shall I rest in a capacious tomb,
And make the rock my monument.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

An Apartment in the Castle—AMANTHA seen on her knees at prayer, at an altar in an inner chamber.

Enter WALSINGHAM and BERTHA.

BERTHA.

“No more delirious, now her anguish seems

“To wear a character of settled woe.”

Since your assurance she should see Alasco,

She has been calm, and constant in devotion.

WALSINGHAM.

You may retire.

[*Exit BERTHA.*

[AMANTHA, seeing her father, rushes forward to embrace him.

AMANTHA.

My father ! Oh ! my father !

WALSINGHAM.

My child !

AMANTHA.

Thy tears fall on my cheek !—thou hast
No comfort for me !

WALSINGHAM.

Alas ! there is no hope !

AMANTHA.

No hope ! O God ! sayest thou there is no hope ?

WALSINGHAM.

What shall I say, my child !

AMANTHA.

No hope !—no hope !

Art thou my father, and can'st tell me so ?

No hope for him !—hast thou so soon forgot,

That but for him, there were no hope for thee ?—

And but for thee—Oh Heaven ! the maddening thought !

That but for thee—there were no hope for those

Who now reject thy prayer, but in his mercy

Whom they doom so sternly. I rave—it cannot be !

They have not refused his life to thy entreaty ?

WALSINGHAM.

They have, my child !

AMANTHA.

Then thou didst feebly plead for him !—

Thy heart spoke not in his behalf—thy words—

Thy nerveless words fell frozen from thy lips.

WALSINGHAM.

“ Hear me, Amantha !

AMANTHA.

“ Where are these cruel men ?

“ Let me re-urge his cause ;—my woes shall wake

“ Some pity in their breasts ;—shall touch them—pierce
them

“ With a tongue of fire !—if they’ve hearts, they’ll hear me.

“ They’ll hear a wretched wife pour forth her griefs,

“ And plead, in frantic accents, for her husband.

WALSINGHAM.

“ Alas ! those transports shake thy feeble frame ! ”

AMANTHA.

Why did I trust to thy cold advocacy !

Thy soul was shut against him.—Was he not

A rebel !—in thy eyes, the worst of culprits !—

Yes ! in thy heart, thine idol, loyalty,

Rules absolute, and spurns the outcast claims

Of kin, and kind, and country—earth—and heaven !

WALSINGHAM.

Amantha, thou hast wronged me—wrung my heart,

And cast unkind suspicions from thy lips,

Upon my truth and honor.—But, my child !

I feel for all thy sorrows, and forgive

What thy distraction prompts. As Heaven shall judge me !

I urged his cause with zeal and fervency ;—

Besought them, as the only boon I asked,

For my long years of peril, and late service :—

Turned supplicant, and washed my suit with tears,

For his sake, and for thine.

AMANTHA.

Didst thou, my father ?

Heav'n bless thee for't !—can'st thou forgive the doubt
That misery wrung from madness ?

WALSINGHAM.

O ! thou'rt all
Of hope or joy that's left me ;—dearer, far,
'Than light or life.

AMANTHA.

Thou said'st thy prayers were vain,—
And they unmoved could hear thee !

WALSINGHAM.

They refused me ;—
In terms of harsh rejection shook me off,
When I grew warm and urgent—nay, my child !
Forgot so far, all reverence of my age,
My name, and service, as with coarse insolence,
(My indignation struggles in my throat)
To taunt me as the apologist of traitors !—

AMANTHA.

A cold requital of thy zeal, my father !
“ For thy devotion, sure, had stood all trials —
“ Unquestioning in faith, and sacrifice.”
But thou hast offered at a Moloch shrine,—
That spares no victim—that remits no rite
Of blood and vengeance—well then ! be it so !
“ The sacrifice they seek shall be complete ! ”—
This world has withered on my soul for ever.—
I feel that now to live, were death indeed ;—

A living burial in a black abyss,
Where such wild phantoms of despair appal me,
As make the thick blank darkness of the tomb,
A cheerful tenement.

WALSINGHAM.

What purpose lurks
Beneath thy phrenzied words? what means my child?

AMANTHA.

To die!—

WALSINGHAM.

To die, Amantha!

AMANTHA.

Yes!—to die!—

To die with my Alasco.—I am his wife;
And not e'en death shall now divorce me from him.
“ Tyrants may tear him from my circling arms,—
“ By violence may rend asunder hearts,
“ That heaven and man united;—but their power
“ Extends no farther.—No! the wretch they've made,
“ They cannot curse with life, to lengthen out
“ Their tortures.”

WALSINGHAM.

“ Amantha! this is passion,—wild as weak—
“ Thou wilt not in thy rashness shame thy race?
“ Or quite forget thy duty to thy father?

AMANTHA.

“ A dying husband claims me—once thy pride!

“Hast thou forgotten all—all—all, my father?
“My bursting heart wants words—o’erwhelmed beneath
“The rushing recollection of those days.—
“Thou wert the first to bid me love Alasco,
“And I obeyed too well.—’Twas in thy glass,
“Held up, with studied purpose, to my view,
“That my young heart beheld him—glowing—bright—
“Arrayed in every virtue.—The shaft sunk deep—
“Deep in the very core of my existence;
“Then marvel not, if thus drawn rudely forth—
“The life-blood follow it.”

WALSINGHAM.

Thou breakest my heart!—
By Heaven! I loved Alasco as my son;
And now, to save him, would resign with joy,
Life’s dearest objects;—give up life itself—
Yield all things but my honor.

AMANTHA.

Heaven preserve it!
It has cost thee dear!—but I reproach thee not—
Though from thy hand, my father, fell the blow
That crushed us to the earth;—“though at the shrine
“Where thou hast worshipped with so warm a zeal,
“Thou hast offered up thy child, with all her hopes;—
“Her love—her life—her heart—her soul—her husband!”

WALSINGHAM.

If thou hast mercy, speak not to me thus!

Thy words sink deep into my soul, and seem
To shed a curse upon my age.—My child !
Thou wilt not curse thy father ?—

AMANTHA.

Curse thee, my father !
Hear, all ye sacred hosts of heaven ! my prayer !
Bless—bless my father !—on his reverend head,
Pour this world's blessings—honor—health and joy !
Ye ministering angels, wait upon his age !—
Chase from his couch the fiends of pain and care ;
And let no thought of his unhappy child,
Disturb his spirit, or molest his peace.

WALSINGHAM.

My heart's sole bliss !—unmixed with thought of thee,
There is nor hope, nor joy, nor peace for Walsingham !
“ Wilt thou not live to be a comfort to him ?

AMANTHA.

“ Heaven knows I wished to be a comfort to thee !
“ But now all's desolation here—I feel
“ The hand of Fate—the torpor of Despair—
“ My heart is seared to Nature's thrilling touch,
“ And shut to all appeal of earth, or heaven.”

WALSINGHAM.

Think on thy pious mother ! think, my child !
Her gentle spirit warns thee, from the tomb,
Weeps o'er thy words, and shudders at their import.

AMANTHA (*clasping her hands with emotion.*)

Mother ! oh ! my mother ! how my heart melts
Within me at that name !—Blest saint above !
Dost thou behold thy poor—loved—lost Amantha !
Borne down and blasted in a storm of sorrows,
Writhing in misery—maddening in despair !—
My husband—my Alasco, they would tear,
Relentless, from my heart—but I will hold him
In the firm grasp of death—they shall not part us !
Heaven will have mercy on a suffering wretch,
That shrinks appalled before the frowns of life,
And rushes to the refuge of the grave.

[*Exit* AMANTHA.]

WALSINGHAM.

Her desperate purpose speaks in every look,
To my distracted soul—
How my brain throbs with anguish !——one resource
I yet may try, to save him—Yes !—the King
Is looked for in the camp—perchance arrived—
My Sov'reign will not slight a veteran's prayer,
Whose blood has flowed to serve him—he will hear me.
Heaven stores his mercy in the hearts of Kings,
That Power may wrest the sword from Passion's hand,
And wipe all stain of cruelty from justice. [*Exit.*]

SCENE III.

Another Apartment in the Castle.

Enter SWARTSBURG, MALINSKI, and an Officer.

SWARTSBURG, (to the officer.)

To-morrow, at first dawn, call forth the guard !
And let the Castle bell proclaim around
Alasco's execution.

MALINSKI.

Why not now ?

By Heav'n, there's danger in an hour's delay !

SWARTSBURG.

“ A quicker process would provoke remark,
“ And look too much like vengeance.”

MALINSKI.

Vengeance !—well !—

“ The Baron's death demands it—what do you fear ?

“ You're now the Governor—you have the power,

“ And cannot want the will to avenge your friend.”

SWARTSBURG.

“ Rather than he should 'scape the death that waits him,

“ By Hell ! I'd seize him in the sanctuary,

“ And stab him on the altar.”—

MALINSKI.

“Send him, then,
“To instant execution.”—

SWARTSBURG.

’Twere too precipitate.

MALINSKI.

Are you secure, their idol as he is,
That his mad followers may not rally still,
And rescue him?—there’s yet a nearer danger;—
’Tis said the King has reached the neighb’ring camp;
And should old Walsingham once gain his ear,
Trust me, his favor will stand good for more,
Than Count Alasco’s pardon.

SWARTSBURG.

That resolves me,
He dies to-day—We’ll put him past reprieve
And should our haste be questioned, call it zeal,
And loyal promptitude. [Exit SWARTSBURG.

MALINSKI, (*solus.*)

I will not trust
This wavering fool—’twere well to make all sure,
Myself—beside my views upon his wife,
Alasco knows too much of me, to live,
If I can shove him from the brink he stands on :
His pardon were my sentence. [Exit.

SCENE IV.

A Dungeon.—ALASCO is discovered sleeping on a bench, but roused by a piece of stone falling from the wall at the back of the prison—he starts up and comes forward.

ALASCO.

O! what a sweet delusion of the soul,
Has that harsh sound dispelled! My country free,
And my Amantha happy!—again all silent.—
I've heard, that culprits cast for death, will sleep,
As sound as healthful Industry—as calm
As Innocence, unruffled by a sigh.
'Tis nature's kindness to calamity;
Her cordial, to sustain the sinking wretch,
About to undergo this world's worst agony,—
A death of shame!—To me, the stroke of death,
Beyond the natural shock the spirit feels,
“Expelled thus rudely, from its mortal mansion,
“And sent to wander, where, what tongue shall tell!
“Where thought is lost, and gasping Time himself,
“Shall sink, with all the bubbles of his world;—
“To me, this last infliction of our fate,
“Altho' the scaffold and the axe conspire,
“To aggravate its pangs,”—would have no terrors,
Since it has no shame—but O! Amantha!

Thy much loved image haunts me—in this sad hour,
The heart resumes its sway—the husband feels—
The patriot's firmness shakes within his breast,
And his own sorrows supersede his country's.

Still hangs this heaviness upon my brow !
Let me indulge it.—Thou perhaps, kind sleep !
May'st bless me with that vision once again :
And thus, death's image yield one shadowy joy,
Ere death himself shall close the scene for ever.

[*Lies down.*

[*A large stone in the back wall of the dungeon appears to slide from its place, and discovers an opening, through which CONRAD, with a dark lantern in his hand, is seen cautiously ascending. MALINSKI, at the same moment, enters from the door of the prison, with a dagger in his hand, and silently advances.—CONRAD has just time to conceal himself behind one of the projecting supports of the dungeon—MALINSKI observes ALASCO to be asleep.*

MALINSKI,

He sleeps—my task is easier than I thought—
And safer too.—I now can, at a stroke,
Dispatch him without struggle. Walsingham,
Is gone to urge his interest with the King—
And may be looked for soon—this—this must baffle him.

[*Holding up the dagger.*

“ Perhaps ’twere well to leave it at his side,
“ ’Twill seem as he himself had done the deed,
“ To avoid the scaffold.

[*MALINSKI advances to stab ALASCO, and as he raises his arm for the blow, CONRAD rushes upon him from behind—wrests the dagger from him, and dashes it on the ground.*

CONRAD.

Murderous villain ! hold !

MALINSKI.

Lightnings blast thee ! Conrad !

CONRAD.

Monster ! draw thy sword,
Nor die the abject coward thou hast lived.

[*CONRAD and MALINSKI fight—the latter is killed, and falls behind one of the projecting supports of the dungeon.—ALASCO, who has started from his sleep at the noise, now rushes on CONRAD, who has hitherto stood with his back to him.*

ALASCO.

What desperate wretch art thou ? athirst for blood !
Ev’n in the den of Death ? ha ! am I awake !
What ! Conrad ! thee !—blessed Heaven ! do I once
more
Behold my friend !

CONRAD.

My ever honored master !

ALASCO.

My friend ! my faithful friend ! well hast thou earned
That title ! but say how—or wherefore here ?
And why this deadly conflict with Malinski ?

CONRAD.

The ruffian would have stabbed thee in thy sleep !—
But now the hour's too precious to explain ;—
“ Thanks to my lucky stars, and Jerome's aid !
“ The dagger has been foiled.—We now must baulk
“ The scaffold ;—haste then, my friend ! and follow me.
This opening, thro' a secret passage, leads
To life and liberty.

ALASCO.

Conrad ! the die is cast !—

“ For thy advent'rous zeal, my friend ! in this
“ Sad crisis of my fortunes, as for all
“ The kindness thou hast lavished on my life,
“ Take all I've now to give—my thanks—my tears
“ That start in fond remembrance of thy friendship.

CONRAD.

“ Then, by our early friendship, I conjure thee !
“ Trust to my guidance now”—a moment's pause
May baffle all our hopes.

ALASCO.

My hopes, alas

Are buried with my country's—I have turned me round,
To look on every aspect of this world,
And all is darkness. I would leave a scene,
Where virtue hoodwinked cannot see her way ;—
Where she mistakes her ends, and instruments ;—
By her own scruples mars her best intents,
And on the web of Fortune, works out ruin.

CONRAD.

Wilt thou not fly from death ?—a death like this !
A public show !—exposed upon a scaffold !

ALASCO.

There was a time, when I had shrunk like thee,
From such an end ;—to shun it, would, I fear,
Have rushed on self-destruction—that false pride
Reflection puffed away with other follies.
*When heroes fall—when sages feel the axe,—
And martyrs die, for faith, or liberty,*
“ The scaffold is a rostrum raised on high,
“ Whence public virtue speaks to tyrants' hearts,
“ And her last looks appal them.”—Then, my friend !
*The blood stained board becomes a glorious stage,
Whereon to act the noblest part of man,
An honest patriot suffering for his country !
I owe this great example to my age ;—
My death may serve the cause my life has failed in.*

CONRAD.

By Heaven !—thy life is now our only hope ;

And 'tis a sacred duty to preserve it.
In other realms we may remain secure,
Till better days recall us.

ALASCO.

No, no, Conrad !

I will not live an outcast from my country ;
To wander like a vagabond on earth,
Bearing the stamp of treason on my brow,
By failure fixed—a brand more fatal than
The bloody mark on the first murderer Cain !—
O ! give me death in his worst shape of horror,
Or buried deep in dungeons, let me share
The felon's fate ! rather than I should live
To be that helpless—homeless—hopeless wretch,
An exiled patriot.—See him pining still ;
Heartsick and sore,—the shadow of himself !
“ His eye turned inward o'er that waste of soul,
“ That moody desolation of all joy,
“ Where reverie feeds on thoughts of bitterness.”
A suppliant to every tool of power,
For what the beggar boasts of !—leave to roam
In reckless vagrancy ;—where'er he moves,
The common hunt for the whole pack of knaves !
Suspicion's football ! kicked from clime to clime !
Abroad, an alien, and at home, an outlaw.

CONRAD.

By Heaven ! I would not damn to such a fate,

The bitterest foe that e'er betrayed a soldier !
But thou hast fame abroad—thy worth is known ;—
We shall find friends and succour.

ALASCO.

Succour ! yes !

*Some wily tyrant, plotting his own ends,
May proffer aid, and use us as the tools
Of his ambition ;—play us like puppets
In the vile farce of state ; till having worked
Our weakness to his purpose, he unmasks,
Rifles, himself, the rights he came to guard,
Or basely panders for some other spoiler.
Never, O never ! shall this hand direct
A foreign sword against my country's breast.
No ! if a people will not free themselves,
It proves that they're unworthy to be free.*

CONRAD.

What shall I urge to shake thy fatal firmness ?
“ If nor thy friends can sway thee, nor thy country,”
Think of thy beauteous wife—thy loved Amantha !
Live—live for her.

ALASCO.

Oh ! thou hast touched a chord,
That wakes my soul to agony !—did I need
A motive now to die—thou hast supplied it.
Yes ! loved Amantha ! 'tis our lot to part—
I will relieve thee from a chain that now

Would drag thee down to want and wretchedness,
And make thee sharer of an outcast's fortunes !

CONRAD.

Save her the misery of the scene that waits thee—
The horror of thy death.

ALASCO.

My life were now
Her worst calamity—shall I, ye powers !
Shall I degrade her from her caste and station,
To grovel it with an exile ! “ Shall my hand,
“ With cruel kindness, snatch her from her nest
“ In fortune's lap, to spread her tender wing,
“ 'Midst frozen skies, and seasons shelterless ;—
“ To breast the world's keen tempest—droop and die !”—
By Heaven ! the thought is madness !—
Urge me no more—seek thy own safety, Conrad ;
I am resolved.

CONRAD.

Then so am I !—'twas not
To seek my safety I came here.

ALASCO.

My friend !

My generous friend !—forgive a petulance
My heart disowns.

CONRAD.

I've never flinched from death,
When all life's joys were fluttering in my grasp ;

Nor will I now cry quarter—I should indeed,
Have better liked to meet him in the field ;—
The block's an awkward pillow for a soldier !
But we shall sleep together—that will smooth it.

ALASCO.

Conrad, what mean thy words ?—waste not on me,
Thy moments, but away !

CONRAD.

Thou wert—thou wert
The brother of my cradle !—that my life
Has not been yoked to abject want and toil,
I owe to thee,—with every good and grace
That flows from princely favour :—and though thought-
less,
Rash, and too oft ungrateful to thy bounty,
This heart has known no pride but in thy fortunes.

ALASCO:

My first—best friend !—the brother of my choice !—
Torture me not with such a strain as this.

CONRAD.

“ ’Twas still the flattering vision of my soul—
“ My sanguine hope—to see my country free,
“ And thee the foremost man of all her sons,
“ Her pride and boast.”—But if the dream must end,
E’en let the hangman wake me !

ALASCO.

Would'st thou prove

Thy frienship, Conrad, in an hour like this,
I charge thee, fly, and leave me to my fate.

CONRAD.

Then, as I hope Heaven's mercy on my soul !
We fly, or fall, together—live or die !
All words are vain,—no power of prayer shall move me,
Not e'en thy imprecations on my head,
Shall force me from my dying friend and master.

ALASCO.

O ! cruel conflict !—shall he perish thus ?
A victim for my sake !—by Heaven ! I hear
The sound of footsteps—a moment, and he dies !—
Conrad ! thou hast conquered—lead me where thou
wilt—

“ I almost rival thy devoted love,

“ In suffering life to save thee.

CONRAD.

Saving thee,

There's yet a hope for liberty and Poland !

[CONRAD enters the secret passage—ALASCO prepares to follow him, when half within it, he starts on hearing AMANTHA'S voice at the prison door.

ALASCO.

Hark !

[Conrad endeavours to draw him into the passage.

AMANTHA (*without.*)

Sir, I claim to see the Count Alasco.

ALASCO.

It is her voice—by Heaven ! it is her voice !—

Hold off !—away !—to save a thousand lives,

I would not lose this moment with Amantha.

[*Breaks from CONRAD, who closes the entrance,
excluding himself from the dungeon.*

AMANTHA enters, attended by an Officer.

AMANTHA.

Sir, I am his wife—our sorrows need no witness.

OFFICER.

Madam, I dare not leave you with the prisoner ;

But I will so recede as not to offend you.

[*He retires behind one of the projections of the
dungeon.*

ALASCO.

My wife !—my angel wife !

[*They rush into each other's arms.*

AMANTHA.

Alas ! my husband !

ALASCO.

Still let me clasp thee to this throbbing heart,

And breathe my soul in sighs and blessings on thee !

AMANTHA.

O ! misery ! mixed of transport and despair !

“ E’en here, where death and ruin close thee round—

“ E’en here—I cannot see thee, loved Alasco !

“ Without a flash of joy—but ’tis a flash

“ That glares upon our fate, and shews me all

“ Its horrors. God of mercy ! what a heart

“ Is mine, to bear the sight unblasted !

ALASCO.

“ That heart was Heaven’s best gift to thy Alasco—

“ The treasure he had hoarded up for life ;

“ And miser-like, he knows no pang in death,

“ Save what he feels in leaving it for ever.”

AMANTHA.

And must we part ?—for ever—ever part ?

Is this the end of such a life as thine !—

Of such a love as ours ? But I shall soon

Rejoin thee—in the grave !

ALASCO.

At what a price, my country ! have I sought

To serve thy cause ! “ It is not life I value—

“ Life is a toy that every coxcomb sports with—

“ Staked on a card—a word—a jest—a frolic !

“ But Oh ! Amantha, in our morn of joy,

“ To forfeit all we know, on earth, of heaven—

“ To lose Elysium, opening in thy arms,

“ And wreck thy peace and safety ! Canst thou forgive

“ The ruin I have brought on thee ?

AMANTHA.

“ Oh ! my husband !

ALASCO.

“ Canst thou forgive, if listening to her wrongs,

“ I let my country in, to share my heart,

“ And at her shrine have offer'd up a life,

“ To thee devoted on a different altar ? ”

AMANTHA.

Forgive thee ! *God of truth !* I were most base—

Unworthy of thy love—could I complain

That thou hast loved thy country. No ; though lost—

In thy disaster wreck'd, with all our hopes,

I blame thee not ; for sure the cause was good

That claim'd Alasco's sword.

ALASCO.

The best that man

Can live or die to serve. “ Yes, my Amantha !

“ Had I beheld unmoved, my country's woes,

“ I could not have a heart to feel thy worth,

“ Or love as I have loved thee.

AMANTHA.

“ We were happy,

“ Until this storm arose ; but I can bear it—

“ Brave it, with Alasco.

ALASCO.

“ Hurl all its wrath

“ On me, ye avenging Powers ! Uprooted, bare,
“ And blasted let me lie, the atoning sacrifice;
“ If I have err’d ! but let the tempest spare
“ Her innocence.

AMANTHA.

“ The bolt that fells the oak,
“ Brings too the entwining tendril to the earth :
“ Struck down with thee, so shall Amantha fall.

ALASCO.

“ No, thou shalt live, a model to thy sex,
“ Of every grace and virtue ; thou shalt prove
“ That Heaven, in pity to the woes of man,
“ Will sooth his spirit with celestial aid,
“ And cast an angel in the mould of woman.”

AMANTHA.

O ! had our lot been fix’d in calmer times,
Or placed in scenes where no rude broils invade
Life’s tranquil course—where hearts might love at peace,
And homes be happy ! “ Wilt thou not, just Heaven !
“ Wilt thou not frustrate, in their impious ends,
“ Those evil spirits that molest thy world !
“ Who vex our days with war, and make this earth—
“ This paradise of Nature’s hand, endow’d
“ With all things for our good, a howling waste
“ Of woe and wickedness !”

ALASCO.

This world’s a scene

Where man's the sport of Chance, and Fortune plays
Cross-purposes with Virtue. Blindly judged,
Our noblest actions hang on their events,
In doubtful equipoise 'twixt fame and infamy.
E'en in thy eyes, if I am not now a traitor,
It is thy love acquits me, my Amantha !

AMANTHA.

O ! thou art all my soul conceives of virtue.
I judged not questions foreign to my sex ;
“ 'Twas all I sought, to win a wife's best praise,
“ In noiseless privacy.” But still my heart
Took part with my Alasco ; when he spoke,
Not e'en a father's influence could prevail,
Though oft in wrath he warn'd me of thy ruin.

ALASCO.

He has himself fulfill'd his own prediction.

AMANTHA.

O ! cruel truth ! But curse him not, Alasco.
“ Although 'tis he has stretch'd us on the rack,
“ Yet do not curse him,”—he is still my father.

ALASCO.

Curse him ! Amantha ! Heaven so deal with me,
As I forgive, and hold him in all reverence.
What he thought duty, he has bravely done.
“ His errors from the spring of honor rise,
“ And take the course of virtue.”

AMANTHA.

Generous spirit !

He trusted to his credit for thy safety ;
E'en now, he sues his sovereign in thy cause,
And my heart tells me, there is yet a hope.

[*The Castle bell tolls.*

Oh ! God ! what means that bell ?—that dreadful bell ?

ALASCO.

Why trembles my Amantha ? 'Tis but the clock
That strikes thy feverish ear, and seems more solemn,
Only as more mark'd.

AMANTHA.

I—hope so—

[*Bell again.*

Ha ! again !

It is the tongue of death, that strikes upon
My heart, announcing murder—misery—madness !

[*Bell tolls again.*

Oh ! dismal—dismal sound !—I gasp with fear
And horror.

SWARTSBURG (*speaking without.*)

Guard, bring forth the prisoner.

AMANTHA.

Oh !

ALASCO.

Now, now, be firm, twin spirit of my soul !

[*Enter two of the Guard—the first, on seeing AMANTHA, hesitates, and addresses ALASCO.*

GUARD.

My Lord—

ALASCO (*waving his hand.*)

I understand—'tis somewhat sudden—

AMANTHA.

Oh ! my poor husband !

ALASCO.

But I'm ready.

AMANTHA.

Ready !

What ! for the slaughter ! Merciless monsters ! No !
Thou shalt not go, Alaseo—while I have life,
Thou shalt not ! Sir !—some dire mistake—my father—
'Tis not—'tis not yet time—burst—burst my heart,
Or give my anguish utterance !

[*The Guards advance to seize ALASCO.*

Barbarians, hold !

Hold off your cruel hands ! Oh ! drag him not
To death, with such inhuman haste, nor dash
The cup of mercy from him !

SWARTSBURG (*entering.*)

Who is it dares,
Presumptuous, to obstruct the course of justice ?
Madam, give way !

[SWARTSBURG *attempts to remove AMANTHA*
—ALASCO *breaks from the Guards, and*
throws him off, with violence.

ALASCO.

Ruffian! know your distance.

Plant here your fangs; but dare not to profane
The angel form of innocence in sorrow!

SWARTSBURG.

Insolent traitor!—But my sword shall not
Anticipate the scaffold—Drag him hence!

AMANTHA.

O! as you hope for mercy in that hour,
When all who are merciless shall plead in vain,
Grant some small respite—on my knees I beg—
But one short hour of grace!—We yet have hopes—
Oh! blast them not—but think the fatal stroke
Is murder, when it intercepts a pardon.

SWARTSBURG.

Pardon! by Heaven! the word has spurr'd my ven-
geance—

Off with him instantly!

AMANTHA.

Inhuman wretch!

On me too glut thy rage.—You shall not part us!
Tear limb from limb—I will not quit my husband.—
Alasco!—my Alasco!—hold me—hold me fast!—
Oh! God of mercy!—Murder! oh! my husband!

[They drag him off, AMANTHA clinging to him till he is forced from her, and she sinks senseless to the ground.]

[Exeunt SWARTSBURG and Guards, with ALASCO.]

[CONRAD cautiously draws back the stone which conceals the secret passage, and looking round anxiously, enters the dungeon.]

CONRAD.

Again all still.—Alasco ! Count Alasco !

Ha ! he answers not ; *(advancing)* my heart misgives me.

Oh ! Heaven ! Amantha stretched upon the earth,
And her Alasco gone ! Then all is over !

The sounds I heard, were faithful to their purport.

Poor child of sorrow, that dost look in death,

As one that sleeps !—I envy thee.—She stirs—

She breathes again !

[AMANTHA, reviving, raises herself a little from the ground.]

AMANTHA.

I have had another dream,
More dreadful than before. Ha ! where am I ?
Awake ? Oh ! God ! there is no delusion here—
This is substantial horror !

CONRAD.

Better far,
Thou hadst not waked, sweet lady, in this world !

AMANTHA (*starts, on seeing* CONRAD.)

Art thou a murderer ? fix thy dagger here !
'Twill be a stroke of mercy, and atone
For darker deeds. For pity's sake, one blow !
One blow dealt here, on this hot, throbbing brow,
To free the pent up agony within,
And let it flame to frenzy !

CONRAD.

She unmans me !
Alas ! alas ! then, dost thou not know Conrad ?

AMANTHA.

Ha ! Conrad !—know thee ! yes—he loved thee well—
Canst thou too, live, like me, altho' we've lost him ?
Ye heavens !—sure hearts grow hard.—Oh, Conrad,
Conrad !
They've torn him from my arms—thy friend—thy mas-
ter !—
Gone—gone for ever !

CONRAD.

'Tis vain to tug with fate,
A moment more had saved him.—

AMANTHA.

Saved him !

CONRAD.

Yes !

By Jerome's means, I traced yon secret passage
To the prison—found here my unhappy friend—
And from his noble spirit, wrung at last,
His slow consent to fly—when—O ! sad chance !
E'en on the verge of freedom—half within
Th' asylum of his safety—he heard thy voice—
Rushed back resistless from my eager grasp,
And—

AMANTHA.

Perished for his love to his Amantha !
I've murdered him !—'tis I—'tis I have murdered him !
Oh ! misery, misery !—was there need of this !—
Of this last blow to crush me !—“ Merciless Powers !
“ How have I angered you !—what have I done !—
“ That on this hapless head ye shower down woes,
“ Till pity shrinks, and madness will not shelter me !”
Crawls there a wretch upon this suffering earth,
So lost—so cursed as I am !

[*A shout is heard from without.*

Hark !—that shout !—

The fatal blow is struck !—*Oh, God ! Oh, God !*

I see the ghastly visage held aloft !

It smiles on poor Amantha—tho' she killed him !

A moment's breath !—

[*Looking eagerly round.*

Are there no means !

[Seeing Malinski's dagger.

Kind chance !

The best !—

[Snatching up the dagger.

Thus, thus, Alasco ! I avenge

And follow thee !

[Stabs herself, and falls into the arms of Conrad.

CONRAD.

O ! fatal—fatal rashness !

[A shout is heard, and rush of footsteps.

Enter WALSINGHAM, ALASCO, JEROME, OFFICERS, and

GUARDS.

WALSINGHAM.

Where is my child ?—rejoice for thy Alasco !

Pardon for him, and amnesty to all !

*[Amantha starts from Conrad's arms, drops
on her knee, clasps her hands, and exclaims—*

AMANTHA.

Thanks !—thanks !—kind heaven ! thou'st left me life
to hear it !

ALASCO.

Oh ! my loved Amantha !—ha ! pale—quite pale—
And blood upon thy breast—Oh ! deed of horror !

WALSINGHAM.

O ! my foreboding fears !—my child, my child !

ALASCO.

Speak, Conrad !—speak—although you blast me.

AMANTHA.

Alas !

I've been too hasty—take me, loved Alasco !
In thy dear arms—I yet have strength to bear
One last embrace—my husband !—how I have loved thee,
Let this sad moment prove !—

ALASCO.

My hapless wife !—

AMANTHA.

Now lay me gently down :—to see thee dragged
To slaughter, was too much for poor Amantha.—
Almighty Being ! O ! pardon, that I rush
Unbidden thus before thee !—Cruel fate !
A cruel fate has followed us, and marked
At last its victim.—Where is my poor father ?

WALSINGHAM.

Sweet sufferer ! here.—

AMANTHA.

Thy hand—thy hand, my father !

[She joins his hand to Alasco's.]

Thine too, my husband—for my sake, live friends !
Forget these horrid broils—that make sad hearts !—
And, oh ! Alasco ! let thy love sustain
The good old man—thro' this hard trial—Oh !

I sink—I sink—how all things fade!—what light!—
Ha!—my mother!—thou art come for thy poor child—
Quick, quick, Alasco!—she waits—we must away—
Oh! oh! my husband!— [Dies.

WALSINGHAM.

My child—my child!—
Oh! wretched father! desolate old man!—
Yield—yield thee, Walsingham!—
Thy honour's all that's left thee!
[Falls into the arms of the attendants.

JEROME.

This sad scene
O'erwhelms him—haste and bear him to the air.
[Walsingham is borne off.

ALASCO, (*who had remained gazing on the body of*

AMANTHA.

And art thou dead, Amantha!—dead—quite dead!
Oh! gentle spirit!—sweet victim of thy love!—
Hast thou then bled for me!—for me!—I'm now
Absolved all duties—loosed from every tie—
As free, as misery and despair can make me!
This is the bloody point, that searched thy heart—
[Taking up the dagger.
The truest—tenderest heart!—no words—no words!—

There are no words !—no tears,—for woes like mine.

Let me then weep in blood !—

[*Attempts to stab himself—JEROME and
CONRAD prevent him—CONRAD seizing
his arm.*

CONRAD.

O ! noble friend !

Forbear, or first strike here—

JEROME.

Heaven shield my son !

ALASCO (*breaking from CONRAD, and holding up the
dagger.*

As you regard your lives, molest me not !—

For I'm a desperate man, that frenzy grapples with.

Think you, the dagger and the bowl removed,

With every mortal means the wretch resorts to,

That you can prison life in this frail mansion !

Oh ! no—no, no !—“ the soul eludes all jailers !

“ Tyrants may frown—the bullying world look big—

“ And scowl down feeblers spirits ;—who dares to die,

“ Scoffs at the vain grimace, and sets him free ! ”—

There is a point, at which the heart will break,—

And I have reached it !—yes—this friendly steel

But saves some useless pangs.—Had she—there cold—
Had she remained to bless me—for her sake,
I might have lived—and writhed through some sad
years,

A pardoned slave!—*in shackles, with my country.*

But now!—

Life's load were insupportable to sense.—

Thus then, I shake the loathsome burthen off,

And fly to my Amantha!—

[Stabs himself, and falls on the body of Amantha.]

CURTAIN FALLS.

FINIS.

LONDON:

SHACKELL AND ARROWSMITH, JOHNSON'S-COURT, FLEET-STREET.

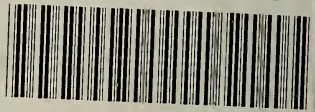
SEP -2 1947

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: May 2009

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